

**PAUL SMITH'S
OPEN HOUSE**
Why buying a suit
could never be the
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THE EYE

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are just beginning

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THE FAST LANE**
Britain's Grand Prix
winner, plus 24 pages
of sport

SPORT TABLOID



THE INDEPENDENT

Monday 27 April 1998 45p (IR 50p) No 3,595

Newspaper of the Year for photographs

Today's news

Extreme right in German win

THE German People's Union (DVU) became the first extreme right-wing party to enter an eastern German state parliament with about 11 per cent of the vote. The DVU, led by a Munich-based millionaire publisher, Gerhard Frey, spent about 3 million marks on an aggressive campaign featuring slogans like "German money for German jobs" and "Criminal Foreigners Out". The shock showing by the far right overshadowed the humiliation dealt to Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats in the state poll.

Right on the march, page 7
Comment, page 15

Union plea to Blair over recognition

LEADERS of 7 million trade unionists will today make a final attempt to reach an agreement with the Prime Minister over union recognition. Tony Blair wants unions to win a 40 per cent 'yes' vote among all workers entitled to vote in a ballot, not just a simple majority of those voting.

Page 8

Disaster warning over toxic spill

SPANISH authorities are racing round the clock to contain what the government calls "an ecological disaster of major proportions" after a torrent of toxic waste spilled into the river skirting the country's most important nature reserve.

Page 9

Drug teaching plan

CHILDREN aged 10 to 15 will be taught about the dangers of drugs as part of a 10-year plan to combat Britain's drug policy. The Government will today unveil a package of measures aimed at tackling the drugs epidemic, including emphasis on the greater use of treatment and counselling for people caught with illegal substances, such as cannabis.

Page 3

Deportation limbo

THE Home Office is seeking to deport a south London family to Lagos although the family has no home, relatives or friends in Nigeria's commercial capital. At the same time, the Ebola family have been told by the Nigerian authorities that they have no right to settle in the West African state because they have no papers to prove citizenship.

Page 2

Business news

Volkswagen to up Rolls-Royce bid

VOLKSWAGEN is expected to intensify the bid for Rolls-Royce later this week by making a renewed approach for the luxury car marque. It follows a meeting of Volkswagen's board at the weekend where executives sanctioned an offer up to £500m to Vickers, Rolls-Royce's parent company. Some sources said the offer is more likely to be around £400m. This would still beat the £340m offer made by rival BMW.

Page 18

Sports news

Dallaglio's doubt

THE England rugby union captain, Lawrence Dallaglio, has warned that he might have to pull out of his country's summer tour of the Southern Hemisphere due to a shoulder injury. The Wasps flanker has been told by doctors that if he continues to play, he will throw his future into doubt. "I need a proper period of recovery and rehabilitation, and I obviously can't keep playing. Otherwise, I will be no good to anyone."

Newcastle back on top, Sport, page 15

Blair's plan to rescue the lost generation of boys

By Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

FINANCIAL support for 16-17 year-old social "misfits" is being considered by ministers as part of a wide-ranging package to tackle the problem of teenage boys who are being dubbed the "Loaded Generation".

A Cabinet minister said: "We are taking seriously the problem of young men behaving badly."

The priority will be on an estimated 90,000 young people - almost all boys - who left school at 16 and do not qualify for any benefits under the Government's New Deal, because they are not in work-based training or further education.

Ministers believe there is an anomaly with families who are claiming benefits getting up to £40 a week extra for their teenage sons, and the lack of any benefit for the other misfits who opt out of education or training.

They are now seeking Treasury approval for more resources to back up the efforts to deal with those who are self-excluded from education or training this summer as part of the comprehensive spending review.

A new social exclusion strategy, being spearheaded by Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, who chairs the social exclusion ministerial group in Whitehall, and David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education and Employment, will focus on three areas: the under-threes, 14-16 year-olds at school, and 16-17 year-olds when they leave school.

Tony Blair received a draft report at Easter on measures to deal with children who are excluded from school or playing truant which recommended a range of ideas, from more pre-work experience for children at 14 years of age, to a crackdown by the police on children "skipping" lessons.

The ministers are keen to see a start made on the causes of social exclusion at the earliest age. A ministerial source said they would be encouraging parents to do more to educate their children by talking to them and reading, rather than "plonking them in front of the television set", before they reach nursery school age.

Children who are not attending school will be targeted. The Home Secretary has been advised that many who "bunk off" lessons to

hang around the streets invariably get involved in crime.

Jack Straw and David Blunkett have been taking a hard look at this. All the studies show that kids excluded from school are involved in crime - almost as night follows day: in fact, it is rare for them not to be involved in crime," said a Whitehall source.

Margaret Hodge, the Labour chairwoman of the education select committee, has proposed a range of measures including penalties for schools, to reduce the number of children they exclude from classes for disruptive and unruly behaviour.

Mr Straw is the chairman of governors at Pimlico school, an inner-city London comprehensive, which has reduced exclusions.

Although the teenage boys are being called "the Loaded Generation" after a "laddish" magazine, ministers believe they are losing out, and getting involved in crime and drugs.

The schemes will include encouraging teenagers who do not respond to classroom work to take up more sport.

Alun Michael, a Home Office minister, and Paul Boateng, a junior health minister, will submit an action plan to Mr Straw's committee including the use of "mentors", where older boys are used to act as peer guides for younger boys; and a campaign to recruit more "role model" male teachers, especially in primary schools where only 18 per cent of staff are men.

The police will be ordered to take on training, by rounding up children missing from school, but the ministers believe that that in itself is not enough.

"We are keen on the law being enforced but if you just round them up, you will be back where you started, with the kids playing truant again. We need more imaginative schemes," said a minister.

An education Bill going through Parliament contains a clause which will allow schools to give 14-year-olds work experience for the first time as a "gateway" to the New Deal. More imaginative forms of youth work are also being examined.

Harriet Harman, Secretary of State for Social Security, announced yesterday that she will be publishing a Green Paper in May building on a £300m plan for school clubs.



Happy 50 years: Children's faces were painted with the Israeli flag at Mazerov Israel 50 Festival, the largest ever gathering of British Jewry, held at the Wembley Arena yesterday to celebrate the anniversary of the foundation of Israel. Photograph: Rui Xavier

Child shooting shocks America

By David Osborne
in New York

A TYPICAL children's game of "bang-bang you're dead" turned to tragedy in Greensboro, North Carolina, this weekend, when a four-year-old boy found a real gun in a grown-up's handbag and, fired a bullet into his friend, who was celebrating his sixth birthday. The six-year-old was killed outright.

Police yesterday said that Carlos Gilmer was found dead at his house on Saturday with a bullet wound to the neck. They were considering charges against the adult owner of the gun under North Carolina laws that make it illegal to leave guns anywhere children may find them.

Also this weekend, the town of Edinboro, Pennsylvania, was dealing with

the shooting of John Gillette, 48, a Middle School science teacher, by a 14-year-old pupil during a student ball on Friday. The boy, Andrew Wurst, is to be tried as an adult for murder, police said. He also wounded two pupils and another teacher.

It is exactly a month since the school massacre in Jonesboro, Arkansas, when two boys aged 11 and 13 opened fire on fellow pupils.

In Greensboro, police said the boys had been playing downstairs while the victim's grandmother was upstairs stringing out a birthday banner.

"[The boys] always used to come to me going, 'Pow! Pow!'", said a neighbour. "He probably went up to Carlos and did the same thing."

The identities of the gun's owner and the four-year-old boy had not been released last night.

Iran holds Briton as spy

By Steve Crawshaw

AN IRANIAN newspaper yesterday reported that a Briton had been arrested on spying charges, after he was found filming in forbidden areas of Iran.

The *Jomhuri Eslami* claimed that a man named as "Roberts Gavin" was discovered filming in Kurdistan and claimed to be a journalist for the BBC, but later confessed to being a member of MI6. "He had a tourist visa and had entered military zones as the BBC reporter without any permit," the paper said.

There was considerable initial confusion about the report. The BBC said no one of that name worked for the organisation, and, to add to the confusion, the Iranian foreign ministry told the British embassy in Tehran it had "no information about a British national being arrested".

The Persian transliteration of the given name (which has presumably been transposed - in effect: Roberts, Gavin) could also represent "Gwyn". Gwyn Roberts is a respected filmmaker who has taken a strong interest in Kurdistan. He is understood to be in the United States, from where he spoke to his wife on Saturday, and is due to return to Britain today.

One possibility is that somebody could have been travelling with a forged or stolen passport in Gwyn Roberts' name.

It was unclear when the alleged arrest had taken place, though the newspaper said the man had been detained for a week for questioning.

Drenched, but delirious, Irish run away with the marathon

By Mike Rowbottom
at the London Marathon

A HUNDRED or so inhabitants of Cornafan, Co Cavan, left the course of the London Marathon soaked but happy yesterday. Shortly before the heavens opened, they saw their hometown girl, Catherine McKiernan, become the first Irish runner to win the event.

McKiernan finished almost 30 seconds clear of Scotland's 1996 winner, Liz McColgan, to secure the \$55,000 first prize in what was only her second marathon.

The largest entry in the event's 18-year history, 30,663, braved what were the worst conditions experienced on course since 1981. Those with something to celebrate included Chris Moon, who lost an arm and a leg while clearing landmines in Mozambique three years ago.

Moon, raising funds for the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, finished in 4hr 36min, two minutes ahead of his wife, Ali, after fulfilling his role as the event's starter.

The men's title went to Spain's world champion Abel Anton, but his satisfaction was probably matched by that of the former world mile record holder, Steve Cram. In his first marathon, he finished in 2:38.13 - which beat the record of his old track rival, Sebastian Coe, by 20 minutes.

Full report, Sport tabloid



PEOPLE LIFE NEWS



Children of five to be given lessons in drugs

By Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

Children as young as five will be taught about the dangers of drugs in a 10-year-plan to overhaul Britain's drug policy.

The Government will today unveil a package of measures aimed at tackling the drugs epi-

demic, including emphasis on the greater use of treatment and counselling for people caught with illegal substances. Tackling the rising problem of heroin abuse is also to be a priority.

One of the key aspects will be educating children. As reported in *The Independent* at Christmas, government ad-

sors want primary pupils to be taught about drugs in the belief that a better-informed society would find it easier to say no.

Keith Hellawell, Britain's new anti-drugs co-ordinator who has helped draw up today's 10-year-plan, said: "Young people are already being informed about drugs and their dangers in

many of our schools... There is no evidence to support the argument that more knowledge encourages drug misuse. So I believe that schoolchildren should receive appropriate drugs education from the age of five."

The drugs White Paper, which will be presented by Ann Taylor, Leader of the Commons

and the government ministerial drugs co-ordinator, will stress the importance of providing treatment for drug offenders, rather than just punishment.

The proposals are expected to include greater government spending on treatment centres and giving some users who steal to fund their habits "drug treat-

ment orders" instead of jail terms. Police chiefs will be encouraged to adopt a policy of cautioning people caught for a first time in possession of cannabis.

Mr Hellawell said: "Treatment works. Research on those referred to drug treatment after their arrest shows that one in four no longer uses any form

of drugs and more than half reduce their use."

The Government will re-emphasise its opposition to any form of legalisation of drugs.

Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, yesterday insisted that Britain was not losing the war against drugs and highlighted evidence that drug taking

among young people was stabilising. But his comments came as a new report disclosed that hard drugs were damaging more young people at an earlier age than ever before. The drugs charity Turning Point said the number of people it helped last year had increased by 12 per cent to about 30,000.

Misery in paradise: true story of the 'Bounty' mutineers

Journal acquired by National Maritime Museum reveals nightmare existence. Simon Tait reports

THE idyllic life of the *Bounty* mutineers on a Pacific paradise island, as portrayed in films starring Clark Gable and then Marlon Brando, was a long way from fact.

According to a journal which has just been acquired by the National Maritime Museum, the early years were a bloody nightmare.

Sixteen of the 25 mutineers were caught on Tahiti and three later hanged, but a band led by Fletcher Christian escaped to an uncharted, uninhabited island and burnt their ship to prevent it being spotted. They may have wished they had taken their chances with a court martial - within 10 years all but one of them were dead, most of them murdered.

The Pitcairn Island Register, which traces the story of the nine mutineers who came to the island on 15 January 1790, eight months after they had set Captain Bligh adrift, is this week being given to the museum by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge to mark the anniversary of the mutiny on 28 April and the society's 300th anniversary.

It came to the society from its missionary on Pitcairn in the 1850s and has been in storage ever since.

It makes stark reading. The mutineers first landed in Tahiti, but Christian and eight others took the *Bounty* to find safer haven. After four months and a thousand mile voyage they happened on Pitcairn.

With them, they brought Tahitian men and women, and started a colony, with the first of a new generation - Thursday October Christian, born in the autumn of 1790. But their new lives soon began to go badly wrong.

The single entry for the year 1793 reads: "Massacre of part of the mutineers by the Tahitians. The Tahiti men all killed, part by jealousies among themselves, the others by the remaining Englishmen." The mutiny against the mutineers accounted for

five of them, including Christian himself.

Then, a year later, the Tahitian wives of the sailors tried to escape. "A great desire in many of the women to leave the island. A boat built for the purpose of removing (sic) them launched and upset. Fortunately for them she did, so far had they launched out on the ocean where could they have gone or what would a few ignorant women have done by themselves drifting upon waves but ultimately have fallen a sacrifice to their follies (sic)."

The journal also tells of the demise of seaman William McCoy. "McCoy distilled a bottle of ardent spirit from the Te-root. The copper kettle of the *Bounty* made into a still, frequent intoxication the consequence, McCoy in particular upon whom it produced fits of delirium, in one of which he fastened a stone to his neck, threw himself from the rocks, into the sea and was drowned."

That was the entry for 20 April 1796. A year later, John Adams and Edward Young believed Matthew Quintal intended to kill them, so they got him first. "They felt justified in putting him to death which they did with an axe." Within a year, Young was dead, probably from asthma, and Adams became patriarch of the community and a devout Christian. When the colony was found by chance in 1808 by a Bostonian sea captain, Mayhew Folger, he found "a very humane and hospitable people".

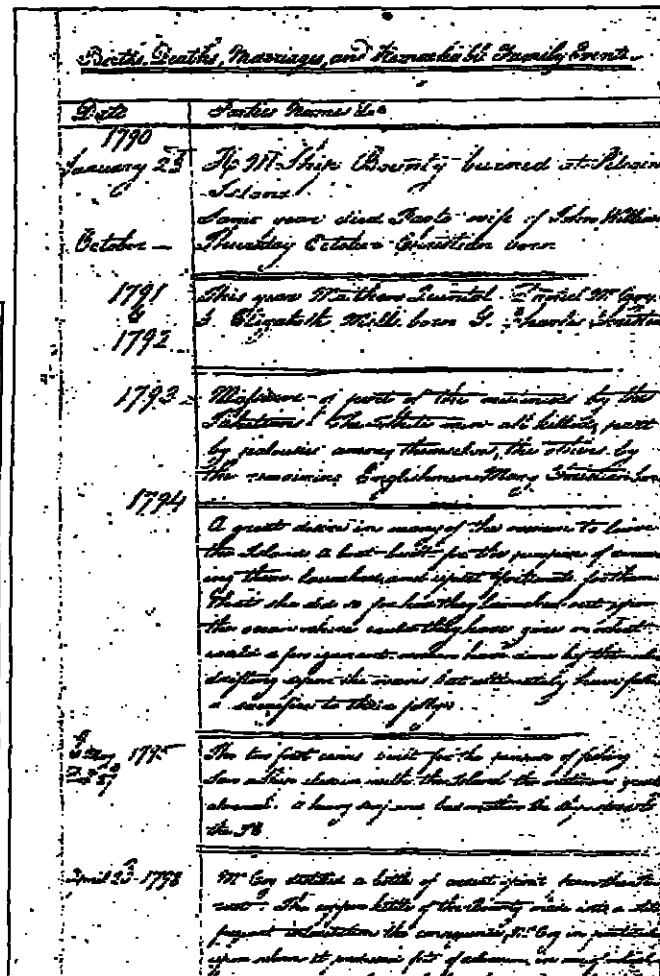
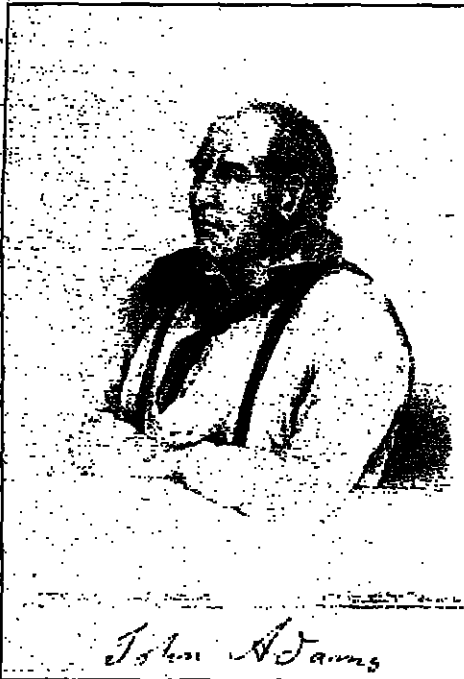
Adams died in 1829, leaving behind his prayer book bound in ship's canvas from the *Bounty* - now also in the National Maritime Museum's library where the register will be available for viewing. He also left his own prayer, in an untidy scrawl on a scrap of paper pasted into the back cover of the register, which begins: "Suffer me not o Lord to waste this day in sin or folly..."



History in the making: Captain Bligh (above) being cast off by the *Bounty* mutineers

Right: The opening page of the Pitcairn Island Register
Below: John Adams, sole survivor among the mutineers, who became patriarch of the island community

Photographs: National Maritime Museum



Voyager into dark night of the soul

By Clare Garner

THE row over the book about Mary Bell escalated yesterday when it was reported that the child killer was paid more than £50,000 for her collaboration. Tony Blair has demanded an urgent inquiry, saying that no one should make money out of such a "heinous" crime.

The book's author, the distinguished investigative journalist Gitta Sereny, is refusing to comment on the payment until the book is published on 7 May, but a source at the publishers Macmillan justified the payment, saying Bell had paid her debt to society.

In *Cries Understood*, Bell is portrayed as intelligent and artistic. Apparently, she expresses remorse for her crimes - which is something the public has come to expect from a Sereny subject. Be it a Nazi or a child killer, someone who spends long enough with Sereny is likely to end up confronting the full horror of what they have done. But they are not labelled evil: Sereny hates the word.

Nineteen hours after Sereny's last interview with Franz Stangl, commandant of Treblinka extermination camp, he died of a heart attack. He had finally admitted his complicity in the mass butchery. Before she started her biography of Albert Speer, Hitler's protégé, Sereny asked his daughter if her father knew about the Jews. She replied that he did, but how could she expect him to say so? She said: "Any man who knew about the Jews and admits it can only die." Quite.

Twenty-six years ago, Sereny wrote the *Case of Mary Bell*, which until now has been regarded as the definitive work on the child killer. Now Sereny, whose innate belief in the capacity for good sustains her on her dark journeys with criminals, is set to surpass herself. Bell was, she believes, "a very special case" because she was "anything but evil." And the fact that she has been able to repair herself is "a miracle".

IN THE NEWS

GITTA SERENY



Gitta Sereny: Dark journeys with criminals

But Sereny's portrayal of the woman who, 30 years ago at the age of 11, asphyxiated Martin Brown, four, and two months later strangled Brian Howe, three, will not be one-sided. Yes, she is sympathetic to the environmental factors in Bell's story (her mother was a prostitute who specialised in sadomasochism and her father a drunken petty criminal), but no book of hers is simply an apology.

Although Sereny has a level of psychological literacy which informs her work, she abhors predictable psychological interpretations. Rather, she sees her job as painting all parts of the picture. "I present it and leave it," she says. "I do not spell things out. I write in the hope that the reader will find things out for himself." She sets out "to know and understand people".

At 74, Sereny has as much energy and passion as ever and, with a mother who lived to 100, she may be in her middle age. Editors who have worked with her speak of her tremendous intensity and persistence. "She is demanding on everyone," said one, "including herself."

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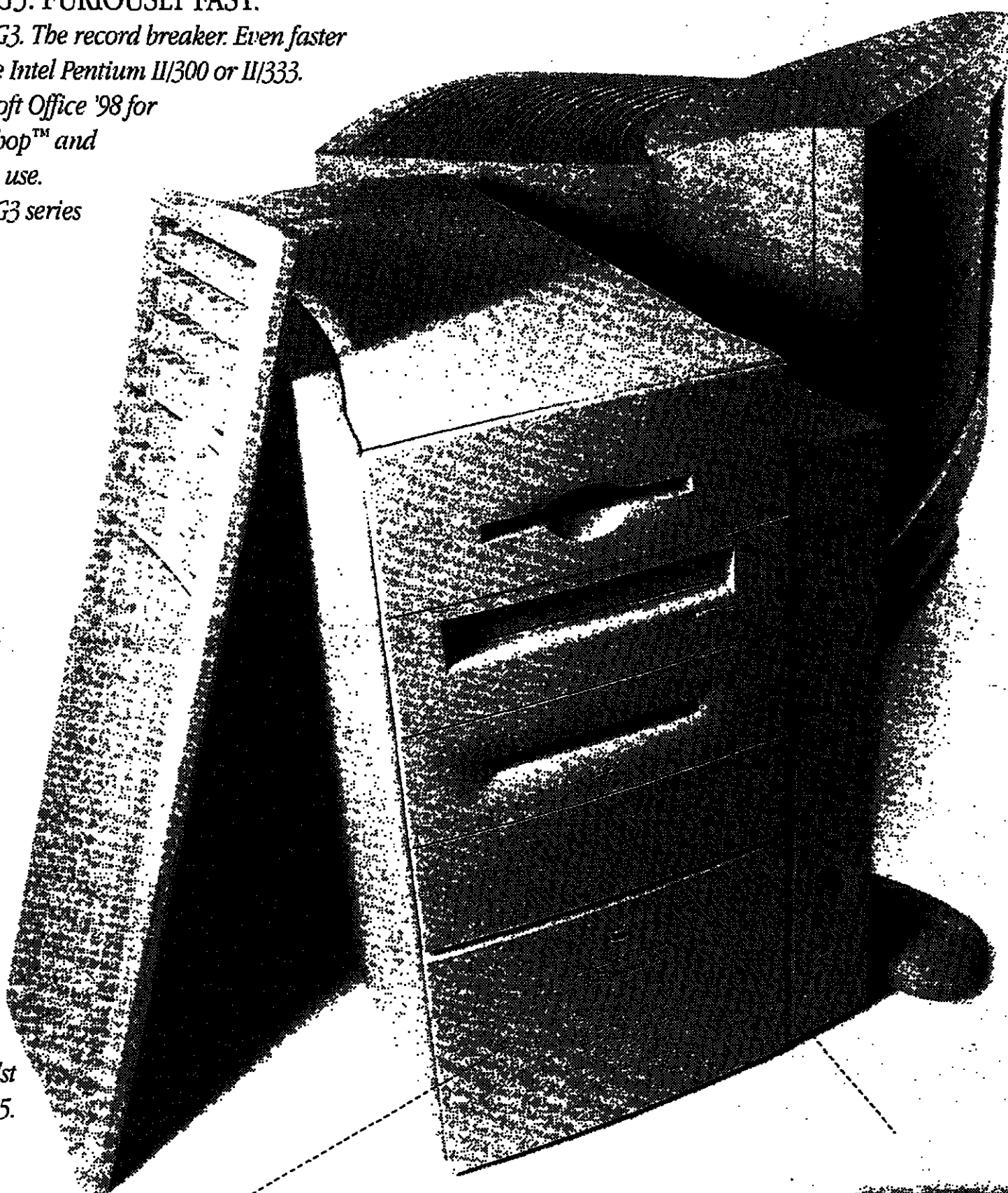
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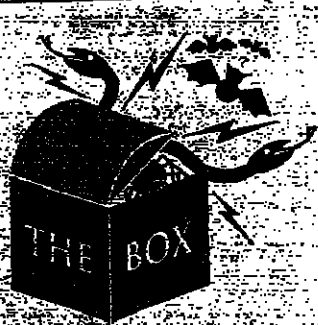


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Tory make-over

Gyles Brandreth's continuing *Sunday Telegraph* memoir reveals, with loopy frankness, the former Tory wing's own bold strategy for stopping Tony Blair. The Tories would ridicule the New Labour leader for wearing make-up in the House at Prime Minister's Questions. This tactic failed dismally, admitted Brandreth. "Our absurd cries of 'he's wearing make-up' bounced off Blair unheeded. "You can't blame a desperate man for trying desperate measures. And does Tony Blair wear make-up in the House?" No," a Downing Street press officer told Pandora. "Although I think you'll find that most politicians use small amounts when they appear on television." Yes, and there is nothing remotely effeminate or transsexual about seeing a male politician, fresh from an interview, with traces of powder on his face. No wonder the Tories looked so silly in the end.

Celebrity challenge

Every year the American media vies to bring the most newsworthy guests to sit at their expensive tables at the White House Press Association dinner. On Saturday, the star of the evening was Paula Jones, who will appeal her sexual harassment case against President Clinton. She was the guest of *Insight*, the investigative news magazine of the *Washington Times*. Its senior editor, British journalist Jamie Dettmer, escorted Paula throughout the evening. He told Pandora that Graydon Carter, editor of *Vanity Fair*, was furious when Paula arrived at VF's glibby pre-dinner reception at the Ellison. "That woman!" fumed anglophile Carter, whose own celebrity guest for the dinner was Earl Spencer. Dettmer asked if Carter objected to her presence. "Yes, I do," said the Canadian-born Carter. The *Insight* group promptly left. Pandora wonders if it was outraged political idealism or simply resentment at having his main cable upstaged that provoked Carter into booing the Arkansas lady from his party.

Driving a green machine

John Prescott's genius for getting his face into the Sunday newspapers flared again when he had a slight accident driving an \$850,000 (£515,000) Honda at a "green" motor show. But Pandora believes this is the moment to question just how "green" our politicians are when it comes to their own cars. Tony Blair's new Chrysler Grand Voyager, for instance, only gets about 23 miles per gallon, while Prescott's love of gas guzzling Jaguars is well known. William Hague drives a huge-engined Range Rover while Paddy Ashdown, of the environmentally sound Liberal Democrats, quashes the greenbelt in a more verdant but still thirstier Vauxhall Omega.

Pandora



A 40-year carry-on: Getting together at an anniversary gala reunion for actors and makers of the *Carry On* films at Pinewood Studios in Buckinghamshire yesterday are, from left, back row: Jack Douglas, Leslie Phillips; front row: Barbara Windsor, Norman Wisdom (who did not star in any of the films) and June Whitfield. Photograph by Fiona Hanson

BBC gives Dickens a popular twist

By Paul McCann
Media Editor

THE BBC is taking Dickens back to his populist roots by using the *Only Fools and Horses* team to make a £4m version of *David Copperfield*.

David Jason is to star as the ever-indebted Mr Micawber while Nicholas Lyndhurst will play the fawning and cunning clerk Uriah Heep. The three-part costume drama has been written by John Sullivan, the man who created the hugely popular sitcom about Del Boy and Rodney Trotter.

The BBC has also cast Pauline Quirke, star of *Birds of a Feather*, as Copperfield's old nurse Clara Peggotty, and is hoping to attract the cream of comedy. Stephen Fry, Patricia Routledge and Richard Wilson are all being approached to take

part. "This isn't an end-of-the-pier pantomime version," said Paul Jackson, controller of BBC entertainment. "But it will touch and colour the idiosyncrasy of the characters."

"John has always wanted to write *David Copperfield*. He read it as a schoolboy and fell in love with the characters. It was the quirkiness of them that allowed him to create Del Boy and Rodney."

In an unusual move for an adaptation of a classic, the BBC will have Geoffrey Perkins, its head of comedy, co-produce the series with a drama producer.

"It is a faithful adaptation of a classic English novel," added Mr Jackson. "We want to shoot the drama as a quality piece of acting, so we are seeking the best people for the roles."

The corporation, which announced the programme at the

Montreux television Festival, was keen to point out that using comedy actors for *David Copperfield* is not unprecedented. The best-known film version, made in 1935, starred WC Fields as Mr Micawber.

Nevertheless, the success of *Only Fools and Horses*, which garnered a record 24 million viewers for its final episode, also means the David Jason-John Sullivan team can make almost

Jason in particular is British television's most bankable star, and ITV and the BBC are in constant competition for his talents.

With *Great Expectations*, David Copperfield is one of Charles Dickens' most enduring creations and this will be the fifth television version in the past 30 years. A 1970 adaptation starred Ralph Richardson and Michael Redgrave, and i

was also produced in 1966, 1974 and 1986.

"Of all my books," wrote Dickens, "I like this the best." The novel, written in 1849-1850, is widely thought to be autobiographical. *David Copperfield* recounts the adventures of its eponymous hero whose parents die young leaving him at the mercy of the cruel Mr. Murdstone. On a journey to success as an author, Copperfield encounters the debt-ridden Micawber, his eccentric aunt Betsy Trotwood, and a fraudster school friend, Steerforth.

The new production is part of a mini-boom for Dickens: the recent adaptation of *Our Mutual Friend* on BBC2, with former *Brookside* actress Anna Friel, was a success with the critics, and a modern day big-screen version of *Great Expectations* has just opened in London.

Comedian signs up for new swipe at Mandelson

THE comedian Harry Enfield is rapidly becoming Peter Mandelson's *bête noire* after agreeing to star in a spoof documentary which satirised the Minister without Portfolio, writes *Paul McCann*.

In November last year, the left-wing comic rounded on Mr

Mandelson at a Downing Street drinks party, calling him "ghastly" and saying he should be sacked. In a drink-fuelled outburst, Enfield even told the Prime Minister that having secured power he could afford to stab the Labour Party's top spin-doctor in the back.

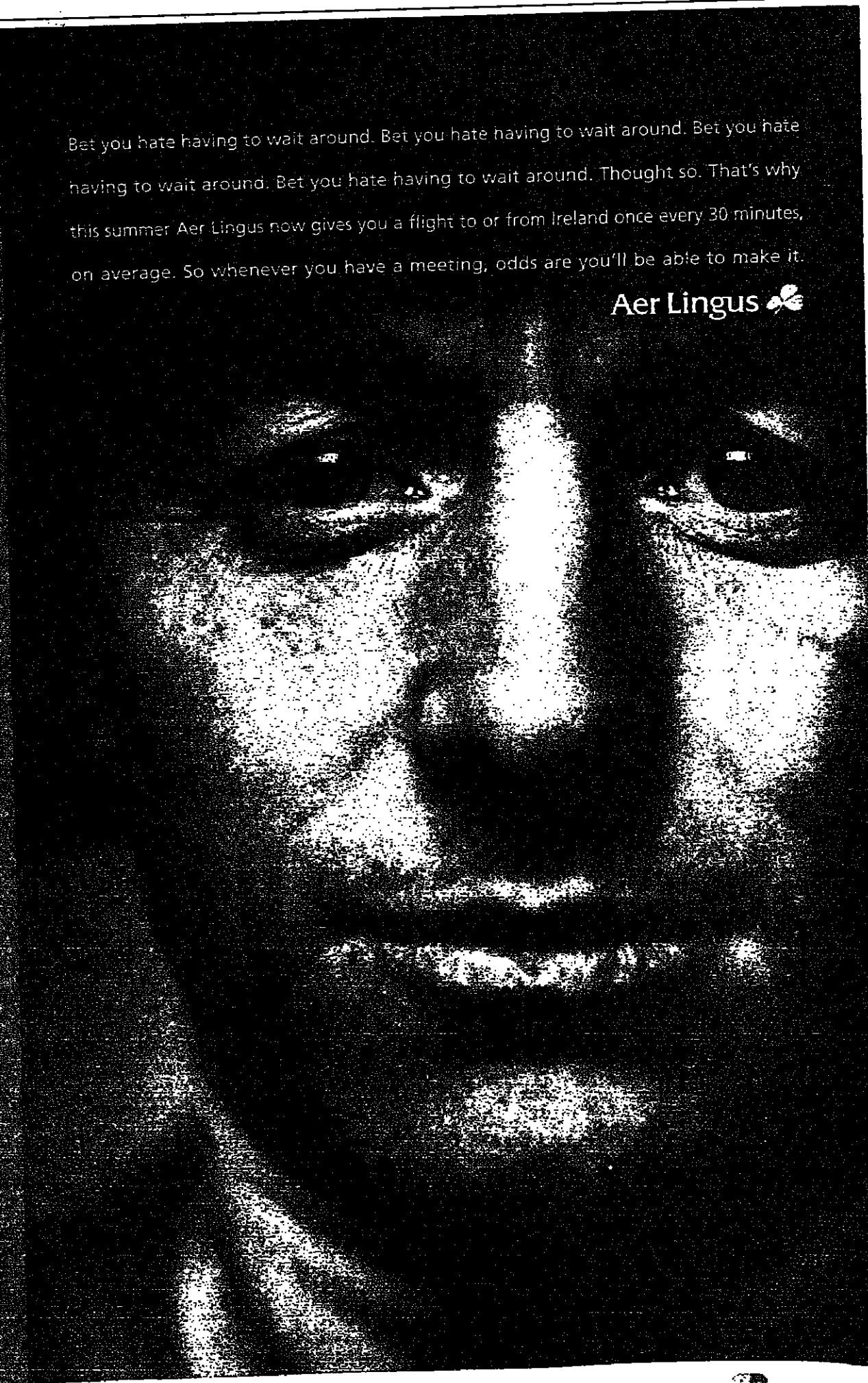
Now Enfield is set to star in a 50-minute comedy *Norman Normal – a Politician for the People*. In it, he will play special adviser to the Millennium Dome Experience. The show – scripted by Independent on Sunday writer Craig Brown – will also seek to satirise much that New

Labour holds dear, describing Norman Normal as the Lord of Cool Britannia. It will be broadcast next year. The BBC denied the spoof was solely directed at Mr Mandelson, but a source said: "It doesn't take much imagination to work out the parallels."

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About a boy: how young men got left behind

Study blames dominant feminine culture for failure

By Sarah Lyall
Education Correspondent

When the Prime Minister announced the findings of a study into why boys are doing so poorly in schools, it was a surprise. But all the evidence suggests that the reasons for boys' difficulties lie with schools and society.

A study from Exeter University by Professor Peter Wright suggested that boys were struggling with reading because of the feminine culture in primary schools. Female infant school teachers, it was found, are more likely to read to girls than to boys, and mothers are more likely to read at home with their sons than fathers.

If the Government could raise boys' standards in English to those of girls, it would be well on the way to achieving its literacy targets. At 11, 69 per cent of girls reach the expected level in national tests at the age of 11 compared with 57 per cent of boys and the difference persists throughout secondary school.

English is not the only problem. The gap between boys and girls at GCSE has been widening for more than a decade: in 1983/4 the gap for the proportion scoring the top grades was 1 per cent; by last year it was 10 per cent. Of 50,000 young people who leave school each year without any qualifications, 28,500 are boys.

But the picture is complicated. At A-level, although girls are catching up rapidly, boys are still ahead in

some subjects and the highest grades, and at university a higher proportion of boys get first-class degrees.

The research into 300 children, which is part of the Leveburn Improvement Project, found that boys improved if fathers or grandfathers read with them and if teachers tried to tailor reading to their interests. Research from the Children's Literature Centre at the Roehampton Institute in London found that many publishers assume boys do not read and there is a shortage of suitable books for them. The study also found that boys prefer fact to fiction.

Guidelines published this year by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, which advises the Government, draw attention to the fact that boys score more highly than girls on non-fiction writing and comprehension exercises. The QCA also suggests strategies to combat the gender gap, such as encouraging boys and girls to work more together.

However, the explanation of boys' troubles lies also beyond the school gate. An authoritative study for the Equal Opportunities Commission from Cambridge and South Bank Universities suggested that the disappearance of many traditional working-class jobs had demotivated boys. They have to be persuaded, the experts say, that qualifications are now an essential passport to a job.

How to be a man, page 15



Boy zone: To improve literacy, evidence shows teachers need to tailor reading to boys' interests

From 12 to 20: a tale of despair

By Kathy Marks

AT the age of 20, Paul already has more first-hand experience of the criminal justice system than most people accumulate in a lifetime and has spent much of his time in young offender institutions.

Paul's story is a familiar one of poverty, neglect and hopelessness. He grew up on a sink estate in south London plagued by crime and unemployment; his own father left home when he was three years old. His mother did her best, but found it difficult to bring up Paul and his two older brothers by herself. A succession of boyfriends passed through their home. The family got by on welfare hand-outs. Paul was often left to his own devices.

He began truanting while still in primary school and his disruptive reputation preceded him to secondary school, where he was suspended a number of times.

By the age of 12, Paul was playing truant regularly and hanging out with boys on the estate. One day they dared him to steal a car radio. Anxious to be part of the gang, he accepted the challenge.

He had also begun to experiment with drugs and in his early teens, he moved on to mugging and burglary. A familiar figure in the juvenile courts, it was only a matter of time before he ended up in custody.

A year ago, the probation service helped Paul to find a job as a trainee mechanic. Paul also has a girlfriend, who has proved a stabilising influence. He hopes to stay out of trouble, but says it is early days.

Photograph: Adrian Dennis



Summons: Peter Tatchell
Photograph: David Sanderson

Tatchell to call Archbishop of Canterbury as defence witness in gay protest case

By Clare Garner

THE ARCHBISHOP of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, may be summoned to court to testify as a defence witness for the gay rights activist, Peter Tatchell.

Mr Tatchell, who was charged with violent behaviour following the protest by the campaign group OutRage in Canterbury Cathedral two

weeks ago, intends to issue a witness summons which would make Dr Carey the first Archbishop of Canterbury in modern history to be summoned to court.

Mr Tatchell, 46, interrupted Dr Carey's Easter sermon to condemn his opposition to relaxing the church's attitude to homosexuality. He climbed into the pulpit but was dragged

away by stewards and a police officer. He will plead not guilty at Canterbury magistrates' court on 15 May and believes Dr Carey could help his case. "I am certain Dr Carey will confirm that I remained totally non-violent," he said.

A spokesman at Lambeth Palace said Dr Carey would be weighing up his options carefully. "The Archbishop's char-

acteristic courtesy and deep regard for the law will ensure that whatever response he makes will be entirely appropriate to the circumstances."

The charge of violent behaviour against Mr Tatchell comes under Section Two of the Ecclesiastical Courts Jurisdiction Act of 1860, which was originally part of the Brawling Act of 1551. The maximum penalty

is £100 or two months in jail. Under the 1551 Act, church courts had the power to try lay people for offences relating to church property. This right was abolished by the Act of 1860, when legal powers were transferred to the civil courts.

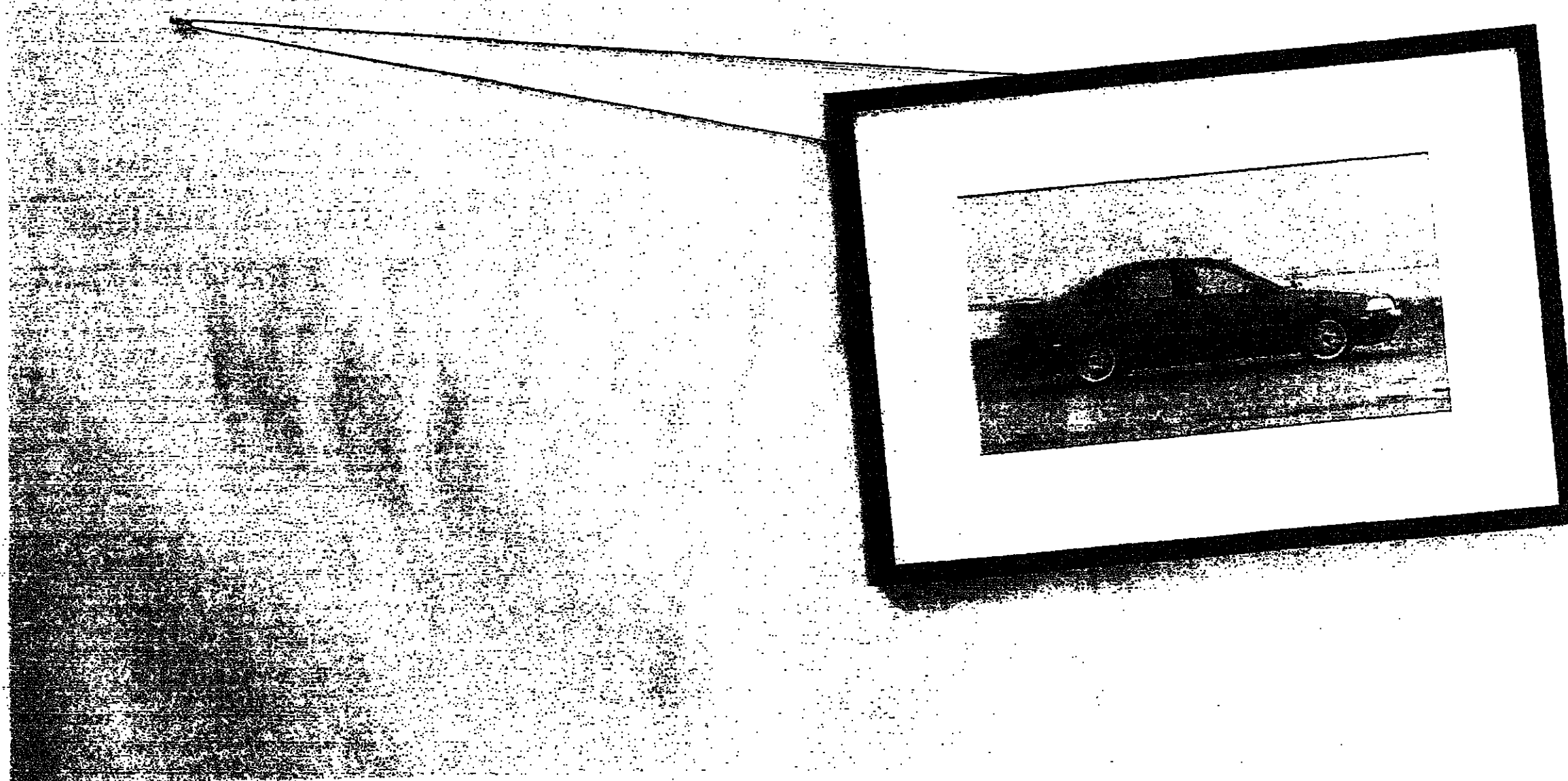
The last recorded prosecution under the 1860 Act for disrupting a church service was in 1966, when eight protesters in-

terrupted the Sunday morning service at the start of the Labour Party conference in Brighton. They heckled the then Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, as he read the lesson in Brighton's Methodist Church because they opposed Britain's support for the US Vietnam campaign.

Mr Tatchell also intends to call as defence witnesses three other cathedral officials, six

members of OutRage! and members of the media. He is pressing charges of assault against a Cathedral official who he claims repeatedly punched him. The official has been interviewed by police and is likely to be charged with common assault. But Mr Tatchell has offered to drop the charge against the official if the charge against him is dropped.

Diana's family want to end funerals



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Unions at No 10 for talks on recognition

By Barrie Clement
Labour Editor

LEADERS of seven million trade unionists will today make a final attempt to strike an agreement with the Prime Minister over union recognition.

Tony Blair wants unions to win a 40 per cent "yes" vote among all workers entitled to vote in a ballot, not just a simple majority of those voting.

John Monks, general secretary of the TUC, is expected to suggest a figure of 30 per cent, with a view to a compromise. It is understood, however, that the CBI has limited Mr Blair's room for manoeuvre by opposing 35 per cent.

The arguments over such minutiae will have a critical impact on which companies will be forced to recognise unions under a proposed law and the degree to which unions will be ready to continue to fund the Labour Party.

While employees' representatives may be forced to live with the 40 per cent formula, they have declared their implacable opposition to a fresh suggestion from the CBI which would make it extremely difficult for unions to win recognition at firms where there had been no history of collective bargaining.

With the alleged encouragement of at least one minister, the employers' organisation has suggested that there should be 30 per cent union membership at any company where unions are seeking recognition.

That forms a distinct hardening of the CBI's position which originally only argued for an initial test of support for recognition in which 30 per cent of the workforce - including union and non-union members - would need to register their enthusiasm for collective bargaining.

Mr Monks and the five leaders of Britain's biggest unions will finally decide their negotiating position before they see the Prime Minister today. The session at Downing Street will be followed by a meeting of the TUC executive and subsequently of the ruling general council.

Union leaders yesterday expected Mr Blair to make his position clear on recognition today in preparation for the publication of the "fairness at work" White Paper which is to be published within the next few weeks.

The Lord Chancellor has told the TUC that the document, which will contain a wide range of proposals on employee rights, will have to be published by the end of next month if legislation is to be processed in the next session of parliament.

Some union leaders expect the White Paper to have a "greenish tinge". One source, who opposes any test of union support other than a majority in a ballot, said the 40 per cent formula could be included in the document as a prelude to further discussions.

Another key area to be addressed today will be the position of small companies. The CBI initially wanted all those with fewer than 50 employees to be exempt, later modifying its position to businesses with fewer than 30 workers.

In response, the TUC has offered a more stringent test for recognition in companies with fewer than 10 staff. Unions would simply have to prove more than 50 per cent membership. Ministers are, however, expected to opt for a formula which would exclude companies with up to 30 or possibly 20 employees from the legislation.

Another area of concern to the TUC is who will decide the "constituencies" for recognition ballots.

The CBI wants the employer to choose with the right of appeal to a representation agency for unions, while the TUC wants employee representatives to decide on the bargaining unit while the company would be able to appeal.

Trade unionists are likely to give a less equivocal welcome to other parts of the White Paper which introduce important reforms sought by the Labour movement.



Sidelined: Ray Dimock from Rhyd Ddu is fighting the plan to run the railway through the valley. Below, passengers using the line in 1937

Main photograph: Steve Peake

Snowdonia rail plan leaves locals steaming

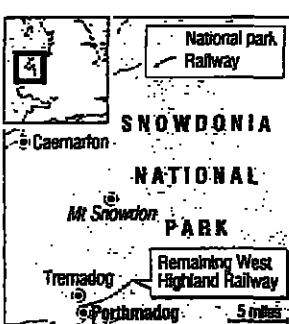
By Nerys Lloyd Pierce

AT FIRST glance the idea of a steam train puffing through Snowdonia National Park seems to represent the ideal compromise between the environment and tourism.

However, as details of the Ffestiniog Railway Company's proposed reinstatement of the Welsh Highland Railway comes under closer scrutiny, critics say the development threatens to devastate some of the most beautiful and unspoilt landscape in Britain.

Opponents of the reopening of this 25-mile section of line running between Dinas Junction and Porthmadog claim that the scheme - which will slice through 25 farms, cut off footpaths and entail ancillary development of cafes, restaurants and souvenir shops - will bring pollution, noise and disruption to an area of outstanding natural beauty.

Those challenging the scheme - the National Park



Authority, the National Trust, the Ramblers' Association, the National Farmers' Union and a local action committee, Gwarchod - will thrash out the issues raised by the project at a meeting in Caernarfon on 12 May, with a view to collating evidence to be presented to the Government.

The narrow gauge line, which closed 60 years ago, was originally used for transporting slate from the local quarries. However, the modern version, funded by a £4.3m millennium grant, will be considerably larger than its predecessor, transporting a 275-tonne diesel engine capable of towing 15 carriages.



Kevin Dent, spokesperson for Snowdonia National Park, believes that the project represents an unwarranted intrusion into the landscape.

"This is a major development which will have a significant impact on the region. At present this particular area is quiet and unspoilt, the extension of this line would destroy that," he said.

Richard Williams, chairman of Gwarchod, who has been farming at Pontreuddyn Farm near Tremadog for 30 years, maintains that reopening the railway will tear his 100-

hectare property in half.

"If this development goes ahead my dairy unit will be separated from the grazing land, which is hardly a convenient option when I have to take 120 cows there every day," he said. "The railway company says it will provide volunteers on the gate to help, but these people will have no experience of handling cattle and are not likely to be there from the early hours of the morning until late evening when you need them."

In its defence the Ffestiniog Railway Company claims that it will be providing an asset to the region in economic terms along with giving locals a transport system which will not damage the environment.

"The extra impact of this project will be minimal," said Eamonn Seddon, its marketing manager. "We intend to be sympathetic to the needs of the national park but we have to remember that this is a tourist area and we need to cater for

them. As far as North Wales is concerned, in addition to providing economic benefits we will also be providing a transport infrastructure."

Gwarchod contests this argument claiming that, with five tourist railways already operating within the national park, a sixth is superfluous and will only serve to dilute the profits of people already struggling to make a living.

"The railway cannot be run profitably from ticket sales alone and 60 per cent of its turnover will have to come from shops and cafes situated along the route," said its spokesperson Eleri Carrog.

"This would prove disastrous for local businesses who rely on the summer trade to make the difference between profit and loss."

"The train ride will take about two hours, a journey which could be completed in 20 minutes by car, so I cannot see that it stands up as a transport option in any sense."

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THE INDEPENDENT

SAATCHI & SAATCHI

Tale of woe for British novelists snubbed for fiction prize

By David Lister
Arts News Editor

BRITISH authors are again largely absent from the shortlist for the £90,000 Orange Prize for Fiction - the women-only fiction prize.

Last year the shortlist contained no English-born writers, but featured two Canadians, two Americans, a Scot and an author from Northern Ireland. The winner was the Canadian Anne Michaels with her first novel *Fugitive Pieces*.

At the time last year's chair of the judges Professor Lisa Jardine made trenchant criticisms of English novelists, accusing many of being "smug and parochial", writing "narrow-minded" books with little appeal for the world market. Among those she named were Martin Amis, Graham Swift and Julian Barnes.

This year there is just one British novelist, Pauline Melville, with her first novel *The Ventriquoist's Tale*, set in South America.

The others on the shortlist are: Swiss-born Kirsten Bakis, who lives in New York, for her first novel *Monster Dogs* about a group of elegant dogs in top hats and tails; American Ann Patchett for *The Magician's Assistant*; Deirdre Purcell from Dublin with her sixth novel, *Love Like Hate*; Adore; the Pulitzer Prize winner Carol Shields, who now lives in Canada, for *Larry's Fury*; and the American Anita Shreeve for her psychological novel *The Weight of Water*.

The Ventriquoist's Tale, a story about intertwining relationships and an incestuous affair set against the cities and savan-



In the frame: Pauline Melville (left) the only British woman on the Orange shortlist, and Carol Shields, one of three Americans included



nahs of South America, won last year's Whitbread First Novel Award. Its author Pauline Melville, who is half-Guyanese, has refused in the past to say when or where she was born urging that her work should speak for her. Before taking up writing she worked as a stand-up comic, an usherette, cigarette girl, factory worker and actress with bit parts in films *Mona Lisa* and *Shadowlands*.

She turned to writing after becoming "bored" with comedy. She had specialised in political satire, appearing at the Hackney Empire with Ben Elton. She gave up nine years ago and says now: "It was improvised. I never did the same thing twice. It was hugely varied, but I want to forget it. I have windscreen wipers at the back of my head that erase the past."

She added that she became disillusioned with comics jumping on the political bandwagon. "Offering radical jokes to get a Channel Four series."

She says that one of her literary inspirations is her former neighbour Salman Rushdie, who says in return that "Pauline Melville writes with an unusually dispassionate lushness that is both intellectual and sensual".

Chairwoman of the judges, the broadcaster Sheena McDonald, said: "It's a very rich shortlist and a tremendous demonstration of how ambitious the novel has become. These are all original, adventurous and generous storytellers."

The Orange Prize for Fiction will be presented at the Royal Festival Hall in London on Tuesday 19 May.

Call for review of safety as nuclear security chief quits

ENVIRONMENTAL groups yesterday called for an urgent safety review at Britain's nuclear installations following the resignation of its security chief.

Friends of the Earth campaigners said Anthony Pointer's resignation as head of the UK Atomic Energy Authority police force highlights alarming and fundamental problems surrounding nuclear safety.

"We are extremely alarmed to discover that the country's top nuclear policeman has had to leave his job because he can't guarantee the safety of the industry's plants," said Friends of the Earth campaigns director Tony Juniper.

But Mr Pointer yesterday sought to reassure the public that the sites were in safe hands providing they were properly funded and resourced.

From his home in Bournemouth, he said yesterday: "I feel the public needs some assurance. The force is an excellent one, the police officers are very professional and the public can be assured that these sites are in safe hands with the police providing they are properly funded and resourced."

He added that he was unable to speak about his resignation because he was bound by the Official Secrets Act.

He resigned after falling out with management over the number of officers needed to safeguard sites such as Dounreay and Sellafield against attack by terrorists and envi-

ronmental extremists, said a spokesman for UKAEA.

He tendered his resignation in January and will leave his post on Friday, after serving a three-month notice period. No new chief constable has yet been appointed and Mr Pointer's deputy will oversee the force until his successor is in place, said the authority spokesman.

Security at the sites has since been upgraded and the manpower of the force - Britain's only permanently armed constabulary - now stands at about the 470-officer level recommended by Mr Pointer, he added.

The spokesman said: "There was a difference of opinion between the chief constable and senior management regarding manning levels and levels of security and he tendered his resignation, but the levels were later agreed."

"In February Mr Pointer commented that he now felt that levels of security and numbers of officers were satisfactory. The UKAEA police authority asked him to reconsider his resignation, but he chose not to."

Mr Pointer's departure comes at a delicate time for the authority, as the attention of environmental activists is focused on Dounreay following the decision to bring 4.3kg of weapons-grade uranium from the former Soviet state of Georgia to the reprocessing plant in Caithness.

Toxic

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Toxic sludge threatens reserve with disaster

By Elizabeth Witherell
in Madrid

THE SPANISH authorities are fighting to contain the black sludge that the government called an ecological disaster after a recent toxic mining waste gushed into the river, threatening Spain's most important nature reserve.

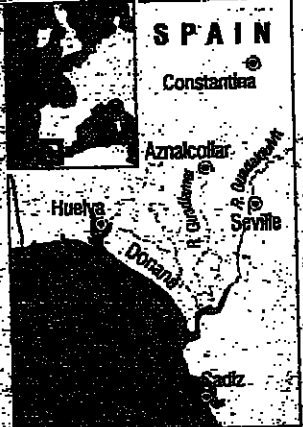
The government insisted that emergency shoring-up operations at the reservoir had diverted the spill and saved the south-western wetlands of the Coto Donana, a key European

The national park near Cadiz, declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1994, is a last refuge for some of Europe's most endangered species, including the Iberian lynx and the imperial eagle.

The Environment Minister, Isabel Tocino, said yesterday that the wave of black sludge laden with deadly minerals including cyanide, arsenic and lead that burst from a deposit lake at a mine near Seville would be carried out to sea.

"Fortunately we can say that the Coto Donana has been saved. The contaminated waters will not reach the wetlands," Mrs Tocino said after touring the scene by helicopter. "But the ecologically important buffer zone surrounding the park has been badly affected, so this is a sad day for the environment."

The Guadamar river rose two metres above its normal level under the impact of the deadly effluent that burst from a 50-metre gash in the mine reservoir's cement walls on Saturday. Up to 6,000 hectares of farmland along the river's



banks were inundated by toxic black mud making its sinuous 50km (31-mile) journey to the sea. There were fears yesterday that high tides shoving up river could force the poisons into the soil. This could contribute to long-term contamination of the whole area.

The corrosive, acidified sludge ruined the peach and olive trees that lay in its path, causing losses to farmers estimated at 1,500 pesetas (£6m). The mayors of seven towns along the Guadamar warned locals not to drink from ground wells, and sheep and cattle owners were told to keep livestock away from the river.

A farmers' association spokesman, Felipe Galloso, warned that the land would be damaged for years to come.

Mrs Tocino said she was opening legal proceedings against Boliden Apirsa, the Swedish-Canadian mining multinational, to establish whether the spill constituted "an ecological crime on a large scale".

She ordered the immediate suspension of mining activity until the broken reservoir had



Sea of mud: A shrine to the image of the 'Rocio Virgin' is surrounded by toxic waste which burst from a deposit lake at a mine near Seville. At one stage the toxic spill threatened to contaminate the Coto Donana national park near Cadiz and seven villages nearby
Photograph: Reuters

shifting sand dunes, the Coto Donana park and its adjoining buffer zone is one of Europe's largest nature reserves.

It is the winter home and breeding ground of 250 bird species and is home to one of Europe's last colonies of flamingos. The area is also the habitat of the rare Iberian lynx and the imperial eagle, in addition to Red deer and wild boar. Other birds include kestrels, kites, buzzards, egrets, storks and rare species of ducks.

The area was once used as a hunting ground for the dukes who ruled nearby. As Donana was unsuitable for human settlers, wildlife was able to flourish. But although the area became a national park in 1969, it has been under constant threat from pollution, urban development along its fringes, depletion of water supplies by farmers and poaching.

An outbreak of pesticide poisoning was blamed for the deaths of 20,000 birds at Donana in 1986. But a spokesman for Andalusia's regional government, Jose Antonio Muriel, described the latest blow as "the most serious incident that has happened in the history of the Donana park".

Desert haven, page 12

been repaired, and promised to take action against those responsible.

Boliden said yesterday from Stockholm that the matter was "very serious, unexpected and traumatic" and they were sending technicians to evaluate the

damage. But a mine spokesman in the affected area denied the company had been negligent.

The mine, in the small village of Aznalcollar, extracts iron pyrite from one of Europe's richest and most ancient deposits of copper, lead, zinc, sil-

ver and other heavy metals. The mining village sits beside a small tributary of the Guadamar called the Rio Agrio - "bitter river" - in testimony to centuries of mining activity dating from Roman times.

The tragedy was predicted.

In January 1996, a former mine director, Manuel Aguilar Campos, urged the Andalusian regional government to close the reservoir to avert "a natural disaster of incalculable consequences". The company responded that its lake met all

the technical requirements and there had been only "a few leaks". The mine authorities said a landslide beneath the containment wall had caused the latest crack.

A vast paradise of marshlands, dense pine forests and

Breakthrough for German far-right

FOR the first time since German reunification eight years ago, an extreme right-wing party which openly campaigns against foreigners was elected yesterday to a regional parliament in eastern Germany.

The racist German People's Union (DVU) swept into the assembly of Saxony-Anhalt with nearly 11 per cent of the vote, overshadowing the heavy defeat sustained by Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats. The result raises the spectre of resurgent right-wing extremism in the east, feeding off popular discontent with the region's severe economic problems.

Right-wing extremism peaked in the years 1992-93, and

After a poll success for an openly racist party, both Kohl and the left are in trouble. Imre Karacs, in Bonn, reports

was in decline until last year. But recent figures suggest racially-motivated violence and membership of extremist groups are again on the rise.

Among Germany's extreme right-wing parties, the DVU is the smallest. Yesterday's achievement is all the more startling, as it held no election meetings during the campaign, and its candidates stayed in the shadows.

Dubbed by the German media as a "letter-box" party, the DVU is estimated to have few-

er than 100 members in Saxony-Anhalt. It is the creation of Gerhard Frey, a Munich-based publisher of ultra-right newspapers.

Mr Frey's election posters, bearing the message "Germany for Germans" and "Criminal Foreigners Out", could be seen last week on every street corner of Magdeburg, the state capital.

Mr Frey identified Saxony-Anhalt as fertile ground for his kind of politics. With most traditional heavy industry liquidated since reunification, one

out of four people in the state has been unemployed for years. The DVU blames capitalists, Bonn and especially foreigners for the plight of those who have been unable to prosper in the new society. Although foreigners constitute less than 2 per cent of the state's population, they seem plausible scapegoats on the dreary communist-era estates.

Unlike other radical-right organisations, the DVU does not employ shock troops on the streets and shuns the rhetoric of violence.

Yesterday's breakthrough owed a great deal to its appeal to voters who had previously supported Mr Kohl's party. With an 11-point drop, the "Chancellor of German unity" was handed a humiliating rebuff, mustering only 23 per cent of the votes. The ex-communist Party of Democratic Socialism was virtually unchanged at 20 per cent.

Despite its setback, the government could draw comfort from the Social Democrats' unimpressive showing. They had been predicted to increase their share by 10 per cent, but in the end were up by a mere three points, at 37 per cent.

The industrial wasteland of Saxony-Anhalt was one of the

new Länder that Mr Kohl had pledged to turn into a "flowering landscape". There are flowers indeed everywhere, but little work for locals, despite vast subsidies pumped in from the west. Opinion polls showed unemployment was by far the most important issue, followed by crime, which is often ascribed to foreigners even by mainstream politicians.

In elections four years ago, the CDU came out on top, but was unable to form a government. The state has since been governed by a minority coalition of Social Democrats and Greens, with the tacit support of the ex-communists. The SPD was expected to reap benefits from the general dissatisfaction. Mr Kohl's party has been lagging behind the Social Democrats in the national polls for months, and fell further back when the SPD picked Gerhard Schröder as its chancellor candidate in the national elections.

While the "Schröder-effect" had been propelling the SPD ahead, it seemed to have fizzled out yesterday. To add to the left's woes, the Greens failed to get into the assembly. The SPD might now have to go cap-in-hand to Mr Kohl's party in an attempt to form a "grand-coalition" on the regional level. This would complicate their effort to topple Mr Kohl in Bonn.

Kohl's unpopularity, page 15

Parisians get solution to parking woes

By John Lichfield
in Paris


THE TROTTINETTE is a frail-looking contraption which resembles a child's scooter, with a small electric motor strapped to the front. It is being marketed by a French company - at £850 a time - as the ultimate answer to the problems of private urban transport.

Only 60 have been sold so far - including one to the actor Guillaume Depardieu, son of Gérard - but the company, Incotex, confidently predicts 10,000 sales by the end of this year. Unlike a car, the trotinette can be folded in two and parked in your flat or office. Unlike a push-bike, it can take you to work or to the cinema, wearing your best clothes, without the need for a shower. Unlike a moped, it is silent and can be recharged from any power point at a cost of three centimes a kilometre (roughly a half-penny a mile).

It would be a courageous trotinettiste, however, who attempted to negotiate the murderous traffic circumnavigating the Eiffel, at the top of the Champs Elysées in a machine with a top speed of 14 miles an hour, with no rear-view mirror and no indicators. It is even inadvisable to stick your arm out and hope the manufacturers recommend that you keep both hands on the handle-bars at all times. Incotex says the trotinette should shortly be available in Britain.



Motoring along: The trotinette, which has a top speed of 14mph
Photograph: Alastair Miller



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ROYAL AIR FORCE ENGINEER

Hillary grilled for five hours on Whitewater

By Mary Dejevsky
in Washington

THE FIRST LADY of the United States, Hillary Rodham Clinton, was questioned by lawyers for five hours at the White House on Saturday in connection with the Whitewater investigation.

The interview, which took place under oath, was videotaped and could be shown to the grand jury that is currently sitting in Little Rock, Arkansas. It was not immediately clear, however, whether the new round of questioning meant Mrs Clinton was likely to be indicted, or even whether the four-year old inquiry was nearing completion.

This was the sixth time that Mrs Clinton had been required to testify in the Whitewater case but the only occasion on which her testimony was taped. Ac-

cording to the White House legal adviser Charles Ruff, the questions concentrated on Mrs Clinton's work as a partner for the Rose law firm in Little Rock, which represented the Madison Guaranty Savings and Loan company in the Whitewater land project, and her relationships with "related individuals". He would not comment further.

The questioning was led by Kenneth Starr, the independent prosecutor appointed to investigate Whitewater - a failed development project in Arkansas - and, more recently, allegations that President Clinton broke the law by lying under oath about his relationship with White House trainee Monica Lewinsky.

The two cases are being considered by separate grand juries - a 34-member body selected on the same principle as

a court jury that determines whether there is sufficient evidence for charges to be brought. The mandate for the Whitewater grand jury ends on 7 May.

When Mrs Clinton was first questioned, she gained the dubious distinction of being the first "First Lady" to be called before a grand jury. Although she came out fighting, appearing before the press immediately afterwards to profess she had done nothing wrong and had answered all questions truthfully, there was a stigma attached to being required to testify at all.

With the inquiry appearing to be bogged down in minutiae as far as Mr and Mrs Clinton are concerned, that stigma has decreased - and with it, the defensiveness of the White House. President Clinton was sufficiently relaxed about his

wife's testimony on Saturday that he spent the afternoon playing golf. Later, looking calm and cheerful, they both attended the White House Correspondents' Association dinner.

The Whitewater inquiry grew out of allegations about the Clintons' involvement in a speculative land deal in the mid-1980s, when Mr Clinton was Arkansas state governor. The land deal failed, and the Clintons have consistently stated they lost money on the investment.

There is speculation that Mrs Clinton's interrogation at the weekend might presage her indictment for at least lying under oath. Others said it was simply intended to tie up loose ends before the grand jury is dissolved, and that Mrs Clinton was questioned only as a witness, not a potential defendant.



Probe: Paula Jones is scanned by a security guard as she enters the White House correspondents' dinner

Reuters

Fickle press pack boo Paula the pariah at White House dinner

By Mary Dejevsky

THE WOMAN who claims she cannot look President Clinton in the face after what he allegedly did to her was an invited guest at Saturday night's annual banquet of the White House correspondents, and so was Mr Clinton - but they did not meet and did not acknowledge each other.

Paula Jones, who is appealing against the dismissal of her sexual harassment case against Mr Clinton, was the guest of insight magazine, a right-wing publication affiliated to the daily *Washington Times* that has made its anti-Clinton coverage into a crusade.

Arriving with her public relations adviser, Susan Carpenter McMillan, and a couple of security guards, Ms Jones had to run the gauntlet of press and TV cameras, and was briefly booed when she entered the hall.

Mr Clinton sat with his wife, Hillary, at the top table, and

gave a wise-cracking speech which brought the house down but did not, to the disappointment of some of the 2,600 people present, make any reference to Ms Jones. Ms Jones, for her part, stood for the sole toast of the evening, to the President of the United States. She did not raise her glass.

Some criticised her for agreeing to attend, suggesting that she had jeopardised her lawsuit, which depends in part on evidence of emotional damage from her alleged encounter with Mr Clinton. Monica Lewinsky, the 24-year-old former White House trainee whose relationship with Mr Clinton is currently under investigation, declined an invitation - as did her lawyer, the publicity-conscious William Ginsburg.

The White House correspondents' dinner has become one of Washington's glitziest events, with publications competing to invite the most controversially news-worthy guests.

Iraq fails to destroy nerve gas

United States Defense Secretary William Cohen said yesterday that Iraq had failed to meet United Nations requirements on the destruction of nerve gas and other weapons of mass destruction. He said UN arms inspector Richard Butler's latest report to the UN, due to be debated by the Security Council today, showed Iraq had failed to meet its obligations. Iraq needs a clean bill of health from the UN arms inspectors before the United Nations will lift sanctions imposed after the 1991 Gulf War.

— Reuters, Washington

Public funeral for King's killer

JAMES Earl Ray, the convicted killer of Martin Luther King, will have a public funeral in the city where the civil rights leader was assassinated. His brother Jerry said he hopes King's relatives, who believe Ray was not responsible for the 1968 killing, will attend the Memphis funeral. Ray, 70, died in Nashville on Thursday from liver disease. The date of the funeral, which yet has yet to be set, will be conducted by Rev James Lawson, who invited King to speak in Memphis in 1968. He was shot on a hotel balcony in the city.

— AP, Nashville

Lebed future hangs on vote

RUSSIA'S former security chief, Alexander Lebed (right), faced a referendum on his political future yesterday in a Siberian governor's race. Turnout was high in the race in the Krasnoyarsk region, with election officials saying nearly 60 per cent of the 2.1 million eligible voters had cast ballots. Mr Lebed, a retired general, hopes the election will take him one step closer to Russia's presidency.

— AP, Krasnoyarsk



Salonika Jews remember

SERVICES across the country paid tribute yesterday to the 70,000 Greek Jews who perished during the Holocaust. In Salonika, hundreds gathered in Monastirion Synagogue to remember the city's 50,000 Jews who were deported and killed by the Nazis.

— AP, Salonika

A spoke in Prodi's wheel

THE wife of Italy's bicycling-mad Prime Minister, Romano Prodi, has had her bike stolen. Flavia Prodi's bicycle was taken from a rack in the couple's home town of Bologna earlier this month. Mr Prodi has promised himself a new racer to celebrate Italy's qualification for the first wave of EMU, expected to be rubber-stamped by the European Union next weekend.

— Reuters, Bologna



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Malaysia fury over 'poisoned' refugees

By Richard Lloyd Parry

MALAYSIA'S determination to deport illegal workers is putting thousands of people at risk of illness, injury and political persecution, according to the human rights organisation Amnesty International.

The group was responding to newspaper reports that thousands of Indonesian immigrants have been deliberately poisoned in detention camps across Malaysia prior to a mass deportation organised at the end of last month, and that police shot dead detainees who resisted them.

Accounts picked up by human rights groups in the days leading up to the riots said inmates vomited blood after they were given drugged water, apparently in an unsuccessful attempt to pacify them in preparation for a mass deportation.

"Amnesty is concerned at the apparent corroboration of

earlier reports of poisonings," said Tim Parry, who recently returned from a visit to Malaysia on behalf of Amnesty. "We reiterate our call for a full public enquiry into the events of last month, and access to the camps for international organisations."

"There were rumours of food poisoning, but tension was high at the time, and it could have been some kind of mass hysteria," Mr Parry said. "Our concern is with the course of events later in the night and the degree

of force which was used to bring about the deportations."

The official reckoning is that eight Indonesian detainees and one Malaysian policeman died during riots which broke out at several camps early on the evening of 26 March.

The authorities in Kuala Lumpur are refusing to allow international organisations into the camps, including the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, in spite of claims that some of the refugees face political persecution on their return

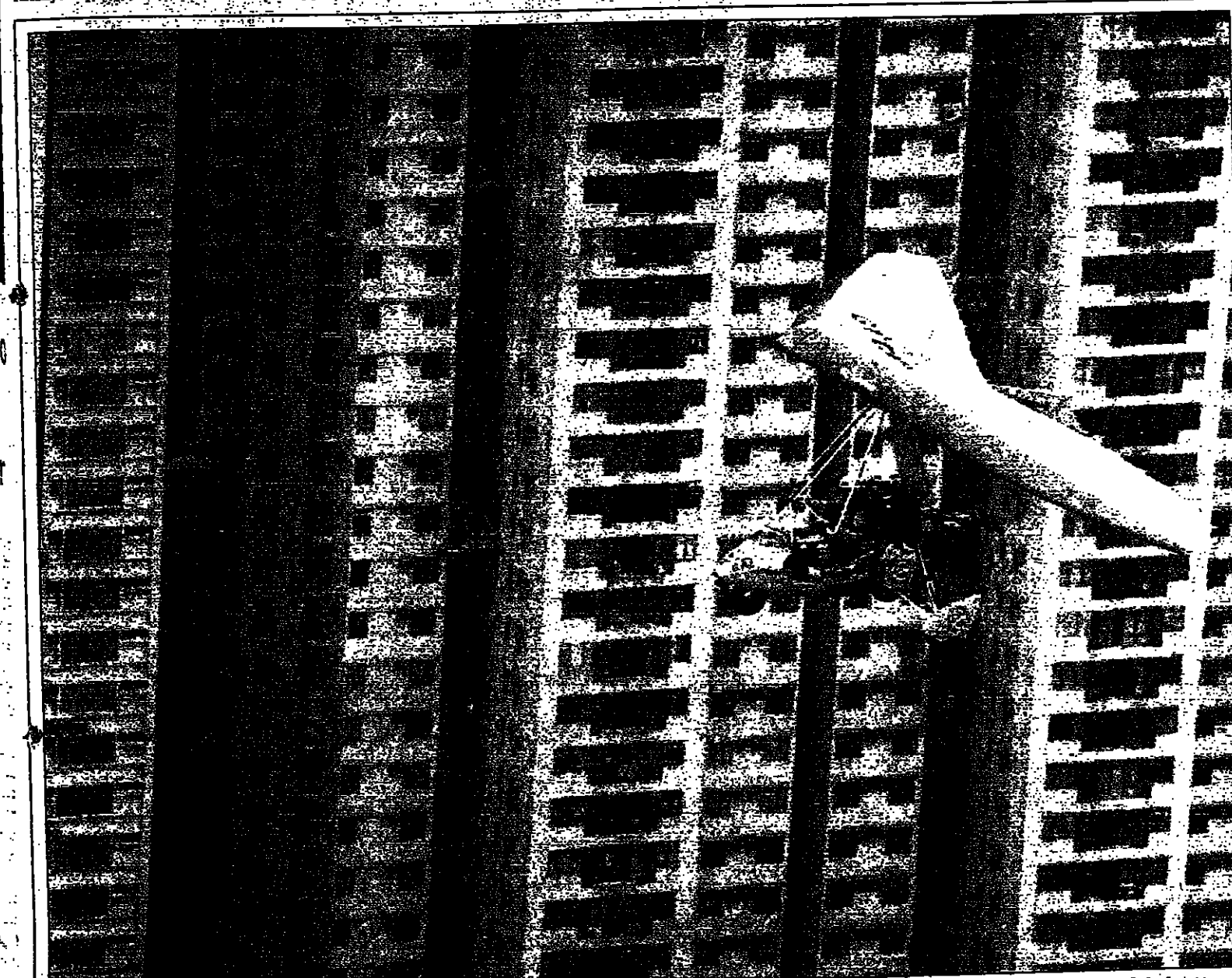
to Indonesia. Malaysia is insisting that none of those who were deported had grounds for seeking political asylum, a claim belied by events after their return to Indonesia. Fourteen of them were detained for being members of a banned organisation seeking independence for the province of Aceh. Twenty-two Indonesians are in sanctuary in UN and embassy premises in Kuala Lumpur, where they are demanding political asylum.

The Malaysian government angrily rejects suggestions that excessive force was used in the camps. Irene Fernandez, a researcher who published a report on mistreatment and medical neglect in the camps, is currently being prosecuted for "publishing false news", a crime punishable by imprisonment.

"Reports which allege that the police mistreated illegal immigrants at detention centres have had intentions," said Mohammad Yusof Said, Malaysia's

deputy director of Internal Security and Public Order. "They are aimed at creating a strain on the good relations enjoyed by Malaysia and her neighbours."

More than 11,000 detainees are believed to be in the camps awaiting deportation. The Queen will visit Malaysia in September for the Commonwealth Games, and there is speculation that the government is speeding up the process in order to dispose of the problem before they begin.



City maze: Brian Milton and Keith Reynolds dodging the skyscrapers of Hong Kong in GT Global Flyer yesterday on the China leg of their attempt to fly round the world in 80 days by microflight
Photograph: Colin Edwards/Picture Partnership

Wang Dan visit to Hong Kong tests limits of freedom

By Stephen Vines
in Hong Kong

THE LEADING Chinese dissident Wang Dan, released from jail last week, is set to provide the Hong Kong authorities with a major test of political freedom.

He has been invited to a mass commemoration of the 4 June Tiananmen Square massacre. This would bring him back to Chinese soil from exile in the United States. Following his release, the Chinese authorities said if Mr Wang returned to China he would be sent back to jail to complete the rest of his 11-year sentence. Before his release he had served one and a half years.

Mr Wang has indicated an interest in attending the rally in Hong Kong, which will be the first of its kind to be held under Chinese rule. In Hong Kong he is the most popular of the leaders associated with the 1989 democracy protests in China. His release and subsequent press conference in New York received blanket media coverage in the territory. This contrasted with the normally restrained reporting of Chinese dissident activity.

In New York Mr Wang has revived the famous Democracy Forum which began in Peking University prior to the 1989 protests. The new forum is for

Chinese exiles in America. The Hong Kong authorities are known to be unhappy about the presence of Chinese dissidents in the territory. But they refuse to say whether Mr Wang would be allowed to enter. Another prominent US-based dissident, Wang Bingzhang, was recently refused permission to land.

It is still not clear the rally will go ahead at all. The council which controls the park where it is held every year must give permission for the event to be staged. The park, the biggest on Hong Kong island, was packed for last year's rally on the eve of the Hong Kong handover, and has played host to massive demonstrations in support of China's democracy movement.

The council has a majority of pro-Peking supporters and in the past has managed to find a number of technical excuses for banning pro-democracy activity. Hong Kong's Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa, has also urged the territory's people not to take part in activities which would upset the new sovereign power.

But it will be difficult to ban a demonstration which usually enjoys a high degree of popular support and will be held within weeks of the territory's first post-colonial elections for the legislature.

North Korea keeps secrets of death toll

By Teresa Poole
in Peking

UP TO 3 million North Koreans have died of famine - or have they? Such is the worsening confusion over the extent of deaths from food shortages in the world's most secretive country.

In Seoul and other South Korean cities at the weekend, about 20,000 people marked a day of fasting in order to draw attention to the plight of North Koreans. This month, the charity World Vision Relief said it supported the conclusions of a South Korean Buddhist group that as many as 3 million North Koreans had died of hunger since 1995. This would mean one in eight of the population.

But officials from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Soci-

eties, in Peking after a two-week visit to North Korea, said they had not seen any dead people. "We are a little bit optimistic about the situation at the moment," Johan Schaar, the regional director, said. "Seedbeds for rice are being prepared. You see some greenery in the countryside now." He did warn, however, that "we are on the safe side", as government food stocks had run out. The main concern of his team, which has been based inside North Korea for more than two years, was that contaminated drinking water meant the country faces epidemics.

The fact that the world still does not know for certain the extent of the famine deaths is testament to Pyongyang's ability to restrict access even to the aid workers living inside the

country. They must apply for permission to leave the capital, and there are still large regions of the country where no one has been allowed to operate.

"These reports [of 3 million dead] highlight the problem that there is a lack of access," said Mr Schaar. "These stories will not go away until North Korea allows unimpeded access."

Different aid organisations are seeing very different things, and the lack of a national survey in North Korea means that the rest of the world does not know whether a humanitarian catastrophe is underway or not.

Catherine Bertini, director of the World Food Programme, said that six out of 10 babies were born underweight and three of those six died. But Mr Schaar said: "We have not seen severely malnourished children."

Basques ask the IRA for help with peace deal

Buenos Aires (Reuters) — The Argentine newspaper *La Nacion* has reported that the IRA and Basque separatist movement ETA have held secret talks in Uruguay about chances of a peace accord in Spain similar to this month's Northern Ireland agreement.

The report, published on Saturday, purported to be an eyewitness account of a meeting last week between unnamed representatives of the Irish and Basque guerrilla groups at a beach house near the Atlantic resort of Piriapolis.

"The men from ETA wanted to know if their colleagues from the IRA thought it would be possible to open a dialogue with Madrid like they had in the complex Anglo-Irish agenda," *La Nacion's* Victor Ego Ducret wrote.

Nigerians boycott junta's tame poll

LAGOS (Reuters) — Nigeria's main opposition group yesterday called for May Day protests against the country's military ruler, General Sani Abacha, after most voters had boycotted elections held at the weekend.

The United Action for Democracy (UAD) said it would launch its protest on 1 May with strikes and demonstrations.

The UAD was behind the call on Nigerians to boycott the elections to the national assembly, and which were marked by a very low turnout across the country of 104 million people.

The success of the elections had been flagged by the local media as a key test of support for General Abacha's plan to restore civilian rule after all five registered parties last week adopted him as their sole candidate for August's planned presidential elections.

"I am disappointed in the

low turnout of people," said Lieutenant-General Jeremiah Useni, minister for the capital Abuja, and one of Abacha's closest aides and most enduring allies. "I expected to see a large turnout from voters. I don't really know the reason for this turnout," he said.

Official figures for turnout are often not released in Nigeria, but officials of the government's electoral commission said privately that it could have been the lowest participation in any election since independence from Britain in 1960.

General Abacha, who seized power during political turmoil in 1993, has not said he will stand for the presidency. But most Nigerians believe his supporters would not have ensured his selection by all five parties as their presidential candidate if he had not given them the green light.

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TELL ME ABOUT

Why humans just can't get enough of a good gossip

THE URGE to gossip, to spread the latest tit-bit to one's friends, is almost irresistible among close-knit groups. But how big is the group that you like to gossip with? How many people could you say that you know and trust to tell things to? Chances are that if you count them up, you'll find the list of friends and good acquaintances numbers around 150.

It's a number which recurs many times in human society. When Brigham Young was organising the Mormon exodus from Illinois in 1846, he co-ordinated his 5,000 followers into 150-strong parties. In armies, the smallest unit – the company – varies in size from 135 (in the UK) to 200 (in the US), averaging about 170.

Why? According to Robin Dunbar, professor of biological anthropology at University College, London, it is because that number is what a particular part of our brains – the neocortex – can handle.

The neocortex is the thin outer layer of the brain, and appears to be involved with most conscious thought. It is only 2 or 4 millimetres deep, yet it comprises about 80 per cent of our brains' total volume. Analysing data on neocortex size, Professor Dunbar found that it correlates well to average group size.

Gibbons, for example, live in family pairs of four to six individuals; they have smaller neocortex volumes than chimpanzees, which live in communities of 50 to 80 members.

And for humans, who have huge neocortexes, the graph predicts a

group size of 148. Now the question is, what has that to do with gossip?

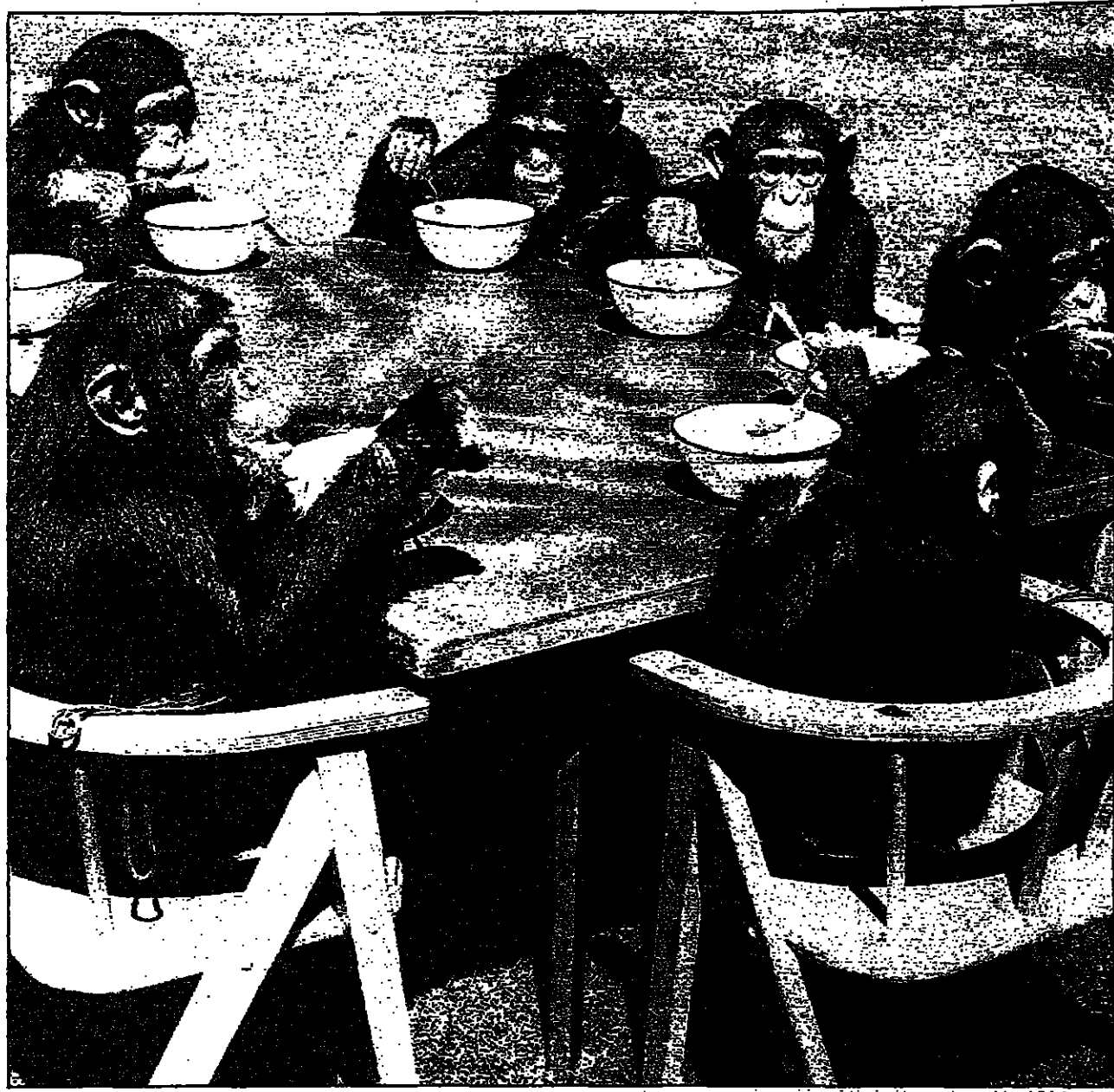
Primates differ from other animals by having very intense social relationships, and part of that involves grooming – a process that plays the role of making friends and influencing people, in ape terms. Primates groom other members in their group, and if they do not, the group fragments and falls apart.

But with 150 people in our hypothetical human-primate "group", how could we have time to groom them all and do everything required for a day's existence? We can't.

But we could find a replacement – gossip. Professor Dunbar suggests that language is a more efficient "grooming" method, because you can talk to more than one person (a limit of grooming) and you can do other things in the meantime. You can pass on the news about who's in favour and who's not while making dinner, or washing hair (a real form of grooming; perhaps that's why talking comes so naturally in hair-dressers').

Quite why human group sizes are so large is not clear; did they evolve from our bigger brains, or did other needs (such as self-defence) push up group sizes and necessitate a grooming replacement? That's still under debate. In fact, it's all the gossip at science conferences. Oh, hadn't you heard?

Charles Arthur, Science and Technology Editor



Did you hear about...? Language may simply be our souped-up version of the chimps' grooming rituals

THEORETICALLY

The menopause doesn't have a complicated evolutionary origin, according to Craig Packer of the University of Minnesota, who says it is just a sign of getting old. Some theorists have suggested that the menopause might provide "grandmothers" who could look after their children's children. Packer's work, reported in *Nature*, shows that it's simply that nature hasn't catered for animals regularly reaching that advanced stage in their lifespan: less than three per cent of lions and seven per cent of baboons lived long enough to see the menopause, so their contribution to child-rearing would be insignificant at that age. In short: evolution hasn't had a chance to get to work on the menopause.

Something actually works in Mir. On Friday, the cosmonauts successfully started the space station's new thruster engine, following a month-long installation effort. "We have no criticisms about its work and I hope there will not be any," deputy Mission Control Chief Victor Blagov said of the engine, which keeps the station's solar panels aimed at the sun. Such engines need to be replaced when their 400-kilogram fuel supply runs out: the old engine ran out of fuel during a spacewalk earlier this month, forcing the two Russian cosmonauts to cut short the mission, rush back to the station and switch on another engine that restored the Mir's orientation.

Or perhaps not. A US advisory board said on Friday that the International Space Station could be up to three years late, and that the US's share of the cost will be about \$24.7bn (£15.4 bn) – significantly greater than the \$17.4 bn spending cap put on it by President Bill Clinton. The reasons given were the technical complexity, and Russia's failure to meet its pledges on building and launching key hardware, due to lack of funds. The original plans called for the first part of the station to be launched later this year, but that is expected to be delayed, perhaps into 1999.

Heat is on for desert haven.

Human incursion is threatening one of America's most remarkable regions. Caspar Henderson reports on efforts to conserve it

"WE WANT very much to go back to [Angel de la Guardia] with time and supplies. We wish to go over the burnt hills and snake-ridden valleys, exposed to heat and insects, venom and thirst, and are willing to believe almost anything we hear about it. We believe ... that unearthly animals make their homes there ... And if we were told of a race of troglodytes in possession, we should think twice before disbelieving. It is one of the golden islands which will one day be toppled by a mining company or a prison."

By the time he wrote these words in 1941, John Steinbeck had turned from his burning rage at the cruelties of Depression-era America to contemplation of the strange beauty of one of the continent's most extraordinary regions. Sailing down the Sea of Cortez, he was exploring the edges of what is now known to scientists as the Sonoran Desert Bioregion.

It's a place of extremes: an arid horse-shoe of land around a hypersaline sea; a sunny, crime-free haven for golf-mad "snowbirds" from the northern US; a land of death, according to propaganda beamed into Mexico to deter north-bound migrants; home to the greatest diversity of indigenous peoples in North America; and a biological wonderland blessed with species so bizarre that even the strait-faced scientists of the early 1900s felt obliged to give them Lewis Carroll names like the Boogum.

The desert is home to 20 per cent of Mexico's total floral diversity in less than one-tenth of the country, and has some of the highest levels of diversity among pollinators (including bees, butterflies and bats) in the world. Unlike other deserts, the Sonoran has trees, tall shrubs, large cacti and succulents, even in its most arid parts.

The region, which is larger than Britain and spans three Mexican states and parts of Arizona and California, is undergoing what is probably the biggest human immigration in American history. The population has increased sevenfold in the last 50 years. And because it has been under study since the Second World War, scientists have an exceptional opportunity to document the impact of human expansion on its ecosystems. In doing so, they may be able to build up an understanding of how its extraordinary biodiversity may be conserved and even, one day, restored.

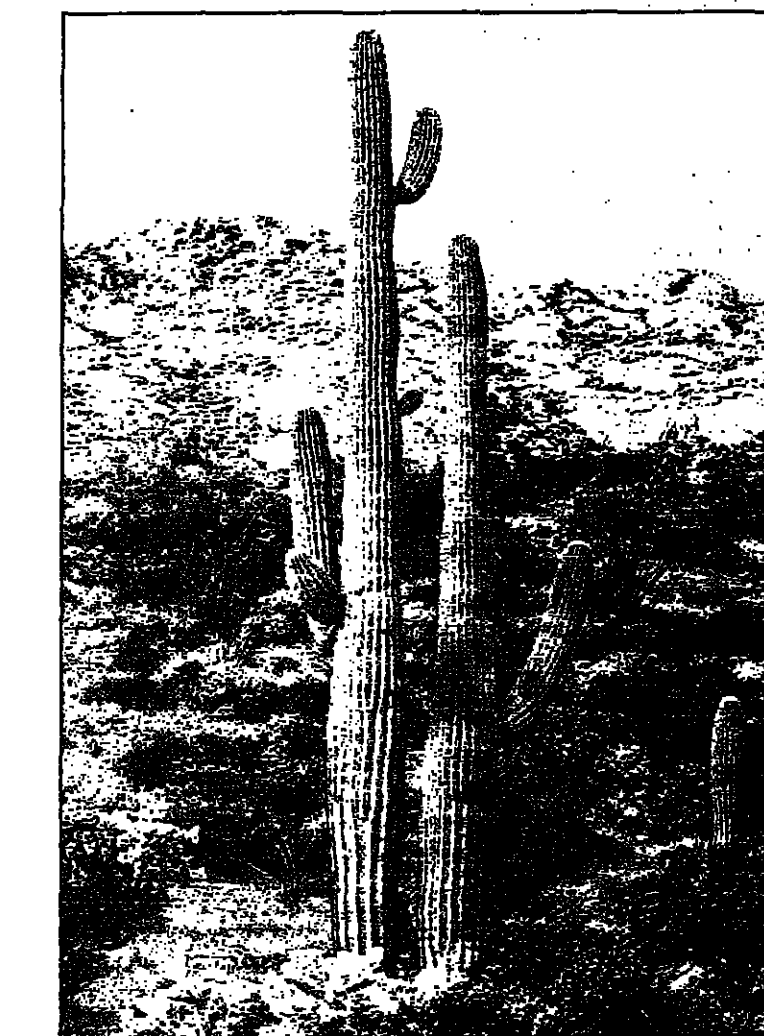
Such, at least, is the intention of a new meta-study, "The State of the Desert Biome", which synthesises the work of around 1,000 field-years of study by 50 biologists, geographers and social scientists into single assessment. (A biome is a large ecological community of flora and fauna which have adapted to the particular conditions in which they live.)

"I don't think the desert will cease to function, but it will be dramatically impoverished", concludes Gary Paul Nabhan, the editor and lead author of the study. "That's intolerable enough".

But if putting together such a comprehensive study is a tall order, raising concern – outside the usual environmental fringe – is even harder.

And Nabhan, who is a conservation biologist, ethnobiologist, and head of science at the world-renowned Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, doesn't pretend that perception will be easy. The media seldom helps.

"Most environmental journalists", he says, "offer a very limited set of 'news' stories. Either, one, that someone has momentarily succeeded in disrupting the plans of the bastards who are ruining the world; or, two, that the bastards are still



Flowers of the desert: Unlike other such areas, the Sonoran bioregion has trees, tall shrubs, large cacti and succulents, even in its most arid parts

Photograph: Planet Earth Pictures

ruining the world." When it comes to loss of biodiversity, he thinks, journalists tell the same doom-and-gloom story over and over. "[But] they include virtually nothing substantial about the non-human lives embedded in that diversity".

The attitude parallels a longstanding lack of attention, or worse, to the diversity of human communities across North America, he thinks. Growing up as an Arab-American in Gary, Indiana, Mr Nabhan speaks from direct experience. The town

was created by the then mighty US Steel, which wanted to amalgamate ethnic immigrants into a unified and pliable workforce.

As a child, Mr Nabhan used to play in the sand dunes on the edge of town. "Like cultural diversity, the value of biodiversity was not yet recognised", he says. "No one knew that the dunes which had survived this industrial onslaught would become the third most biologically diverse national park in the continental US."

As a young man working on the railroad tracks through the dunes he first noticed how his life was still connected to primordial events. "As I glanced up from driving spikes into the ground, a half-dozen migrating great blue herons captured my attention. Half of my life has passed since then, but I can still see them flying low in the air above the steel mills."

For many indigenous animals and plants in the Sonoran, including the long-nosed bat, desert big-horn sheep, desert tortoise, piñon pine cactus and San Xavier talia snail, it is crunch time.

Extinction may be just around the corner. But most attention on the US side of the border in recent months has focused on the plight of the cactus-ferocious pygmy owl, which was recently added to the Endangered Species list and has become the Southwest's equivalent of the spotted owl of the Pacific Northwest – for some an icon of an environment to cherish, for others a symbol of misplaced priorities.

But Mr Nabhan points to some positive trends. For example, very large tracts of land have come under protection in the Mexican state of Sonora in recent years. And in 1994 the Mexican government protected the ironwood tree (a mainstay of desert ecology) from intense fuel wood cutting. There has also been a movement towards collaboration among some environmentalists and ranchers.

Mr Nabhan says American and Mexican incomers need to learn from the all-but-extinct practices of indigenous people, even about such technical matters as wa-

terised management. Eighteen tribes still own vast tracts of land, but have largely given up traditional farming practices. Yet before colonisation, watersheds in some areas were managed so that hardly a drop of rain fell without having had its erosive force broken by terraces and check dams, then channelled into canals for agricultural and domestic uses.

"The State of the Desert Biome" focuses on four requirements for the restoration of a balanced and sustainable human presence in the region.

Regarding the Colorado and other rivers, the flow into coastal lagoons and estuaries of the Gulf of California must be guaranteed to ensure nutrient and freshwater flow essential for life in these regions. Secondly, urban planning and agricultural lands restoration must allow for continuous corridors for wildlife passage through urban areas.

Thirdly, the management of critical habitats in protected areas must be redirected away from recreation or protection of single species or features; instead the focus must shift to overall biodiversity and the integrity of habitats. Lastly, the impacts of development in coastal and island regions where endemism is the highest, must be reduced.

If these requirements can be met there is a chance of restoring the wonder felt by the pioneering ecologist Aldo Leopold when he visited a watershed high in Sierra Madre mountains.

Coming here late in life, Leopold said that he "first clearly recognised that the land is an organism, that in all my life I had seen only sick land, whereas here was a biota in perfect health".

To this, Mr Nabhan adds: "If I could distil what I have learnt during a thousand and one nights working as a field biologist, waiting around campfires while mist netting bats, running lines of live traps, or pressing plants, it would be this: each plant or animal has a story of some unique way of living in this world."

"By tracking down their stories to the finest detail, our own lives may be informed and enriched."

THE STARS IN MAY

THE appearance of the star Vega in the eastern sky this month means that the warmer days can't be a long way off. In high summer, this brilliant, pure-white star – the fifth-brightest in the sky – shines directly overhead, dominating a trio of bright stars nicknamed

the "Summer Triangle". At a distance of 26 light years, it is a nearby star, and quite a bit younger than the Sun.

In 1983, it was the target of a survey by Iras, the Infrared Astronomical Satellite. Iras was designed to look for "lulawarm" objects in space, in-

cluding giant gas clouds where stars are being born. But it made plenty of unexpected discoveries as well. Surrounding Vega, and a few other stars, Iras could just make out clouds of coolish material. Astronomers suspected that these could be discs of dust and gas

forming into planetary systems, like our solar system did nearly 5 million years ago. But follow-up observations from the ground proved difficult – until now. Two teams of astronomers using highly sensitive telescopes in Chile and Hawaii have now discovered a

definite disc around another star even younger than Vega. Known unromantically by its catalogue number HR 4796A, the star is only 10 million years old – similar to the age of the Sun when it started its own family. What is exciting to astronomers is that planets already seem to have been born there. The disc is shaped like a Polo mint, with a hole in the middle. Scientists believe that this area has been swept clear by fledgling planets, working like gravitational vacuum cleaners on the dust.

In the same week as the HR 4796A discovery, a team of American astronomers confirmed that there is a disc around Fomalhaut (another Iras star) which also has a hole in just the right place. They also checked out Vega. The Iras

material here is indeed in the form of a disc, around the star – but there is no sign of a tell-tale hole in the middle.

Perhaps the dust here never accumulated into planets, and has been left as a stillborn solar system.

Although nobody has yet directly seen a planet around another star, astronomers are now coming to believe that other planetary systems are common.

As well as the dusty discs, about a dozen extrasolar planets have been pinpointed in the last three years from the massive gravitational pull they exert on their parent star.

These are huge planets – all more massive than Jupiter – but no one doubts that Earth-mass worlds must also co-exist with some of them.

What's Up

The spring constellations of Bootes, Virgo and Leo are putting on a good show in the south.

If you have clear skies and access to a small telescope, sweep the "bowl" of Y-shaped Virgo. You should be able to spot a handful of the 3,000-odd galaxies making up the giant Virgo cluster, some 50 million light-years away.

There's slightly increased shooting star activity around 4 May, when the Eta Aquarid meteors put on a show. However, they appear to emanate from very low down in the sky, and will not be at all sensational.

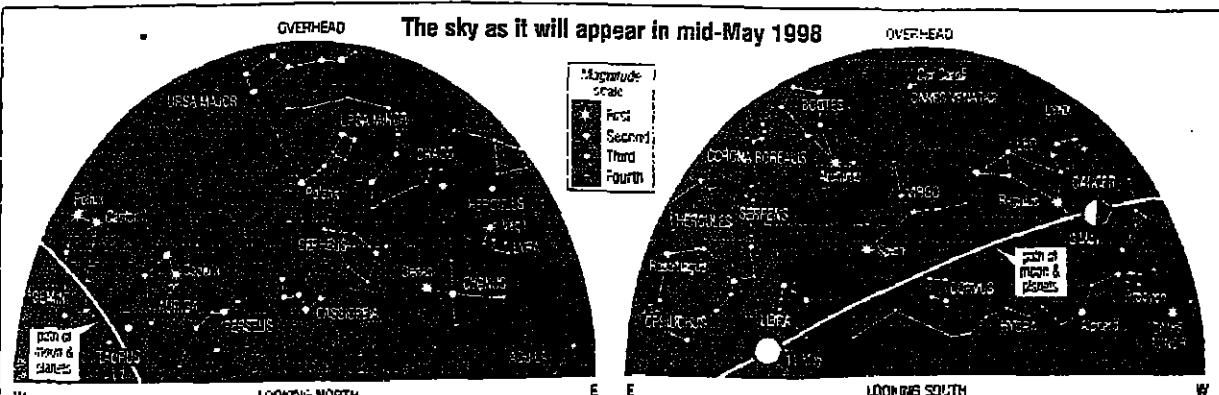
All the planetary activity is concentrated in the morning sky. Venus rises about an hour before the Sun at the beginning of May, increasing to two hours by the

end of the month. On 28 May, Venus will be half a moon wide from the planet Saturn – a lovely sight in binoculars. Saturn, too, rises about an hour before the Sun, and the Moon passes close to it on 23 May. Jupiter is now drawing away from the Sun and growing brighter, rising at about 2.30 BST mid-month. The Moon is very close to it on 21 May. Neither Mercury nor Mars is visible.

Diary for May

(all times 24-hour, BST)
3rd: 1104 Moon at first quarter.
4th: Maximum of Eta Aquarid meteors.
11th: 1529 Full Moon.
19th: 0536 Moon last quarter.
25th: 2032 New Moon.

– Heather Couper and Nigel Henbest



هكذا من الان



Tony Parsons on Tony Parsons: "I want to be remembered as a Keith Waterhouse or Paul Foot"

Photograph: Glynn Griffiths

Prof Parsons, in a class apart

THE DEBORAH ROSS INTERVIEW



Tony Parsons may be the ultimate working-class boy made good, but he rarely forgets to remind you just how hard he had to work to get to the top

TONY PARSONS. Journalist. Columnist. Broadcaster. Regular pundit on BBC2's *The Late Review*. Even "Britain's foremost cultural commentator," according to the blurb that accompanies his latest book. But, mostly, a working-class boy made good, a position he works as if it were one of the stalls down Albert Square. "Lovely, ripe thoughts on class in Britain today."

Fresh (ish) and juicy. Splendid polemic on Stamping Out Sloanes going for a lot of money, because there's no point establishing a niche unless you can make it a lucrative one. "Have a squeeze, love. Top quality stuff."

I think Tony is smart. But then so does everyone else. But still, you wish he'd stop flexing his working-class roots quite so much. It does get tiresome. It's enough to make you want to be your middle-class ones. I'm middle class and I love it. I have fruit in the house, even when no one is poorly. I don't have to have a big nasty dog called Tyson. I get a small cleaner called Doris instead. Doris has never knowingly sunk her teeth into a jogger's ankles. When you say "sit" to Doris she doesn't always obey, but that's OK because, as she says: "I won't at the moment, dear, because I haven't got round the bath with the Viakal yet."

Tony's not an entirely bad sport. Tony laughs. He is now 44, but he's very fit-looking, and has brilliant teeth. He started off as a fierce, pale, speeding punk on the *New Musical Express* in the 1970s. He was the first bloke to take Julie Burchill to bed. He's done some unthinkably brave things in his time. He's also done most drugs. But he stopped all that at 23. You have to, he says, unless you want to end up looking like Keith Richards and "being a pathetic old git". Now, he does his Nordic Ski machine instead. He has good, hard arms. There's still a rude energy to him. You could possibly fancy him, in a Lady Chatterley sort of way. Yes, I've read the bit in Julie's Burchill's recent biography where she describes losing her virginity to Tony. "A nasty, brutish, short shag." But this isn't necessarily off-putting. It

could have been a nasty, brutish, long shag. I like Tony. In particular, I like him on *The Late Review*. I'm not sure he ever truly believes what he says, but he says it well. I like him a lot better than, say, Tom Paulin, the despairing, moist-eyed poet who just seems to say the same thing again and again - "ohhhhh, so mediocre". Does Tom ever like anything? "He likes the odd Keane Reeves movie, yes," says Tony. But while I like Tony, I'm not sure he's the cultural figure - quite the "foremost commentator" - he thinks he is. Now, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking I'm eaten up with personal envy, which is also what Tony would say. But this is entirely untrue. Tony's done well out of journalism, but then so, too, have I. Aside from Doris, I've also got a wok and a Tesco clubcard. I'm not sure I've ever mastered either fully but, still, they must count for something.

What does Tony count for these days? His forays into telly - *Parsons on Class* (BBC2), *Big Mouth* (chat show for C4), *Equal but Different* (documentary on the differences between men and women for C4) - have all been spectacularly ill-received. He blames the critics: "All those reviewers with their double-barrelled names - Lucy Hughes Hallet, Victor Lewis Smith, Nancy Banks Smith. Is a double barrel a qualification for the job? The reaction was typical of the middle-class attitude to the working class - they think they need protecting."

Certainly, he can take himself too seriously. And he is quite vain. In 1990, he wrote a best-selling biography of George Michael, who is a friend. I ask about the recent toilet business.

Tony says: "What I couldn't believe were the pictures of him. So fat. You've really got to look after yourself once you pass 30."

However, it would be wrong to say he's never made his mark and, in some ways, doesn't continue to do so.

His latest book is a collection of his journalism. Some of it is weak. His cov-

erage of Diana's funeral for the *Daily Mirror* shows him at his *Woman's Own* worst. "In any bereavement, there comes a moment when the unimaginable becomes unbearable, when you realise that your loved one is truly gone forever."

This is the sort of stuff you squeeze, then quickly put back. But also included, is a jolly good piece on fatherhood and his relationship with his son. "I wish my son would take on board the few things I know are true... I have slept with three women in three nights and I know that on the fourth morning I didn't wake up feeling like a stud. I woke up wishing I had someone who I loved and who loved me in return... but how can you tell your son these things?"

Tony ended up marrying Julie. They had a son, Bobby, now 18 and a youth player for Brighton football team. Julie left when Bobby was five.

Tony doesn't blame her for leaving. He'd been unfaithful. But her contact with Bobby rapidly tailed off. "Eventually, not even a birthday card... but I don't want to get into a Punch & Judy thing here."

Tony got custody and raised Bobby. He didn't do it entirely on his own. "My mum was around. There were au-pairs, girlfriends. I admire anyone who sticks by their kid, but women do it all the time, and they don't get treated as heroes for it." Still, it makes him a mensch in my book. This sort of stuff really does count.

We meet in Islington, in the smart bit, where he now lives with his second wife, Yuriko, a 29-year-old Japanese translator whom he met in a sushi bar. She was over here studying interior design. He was eating alone on the next stool. He was about to embark on a trip to Japan, so he

alot ones and, do you know what, they don't even work properly. Only do one side. Make a terrible noise. But if you've been brought up on Kenwood toasters, you do want a Dualit when you can afford it."

Tony's mum was a dinner lady from Plaistow. His dad, Victor William Robert Parsons, was a war hero from the Old Kent Road. He won the DSM while serving as a commando in the Second World War. "Perhaps every father is a hero to his son, but mine was the real thing."

His father became a greengrocer after the war and Tony was born above the shop in Romford, Essex, where his parents had moved as part of the Cockney diaspora. Victor was a hard worker.

"My two memories of the 1966 World Cup are saying 'Fuck' in front of my mother when the Germans equalised. And the other is that my dad had to work that day, that special day, just like every other Saturday."

He says his father was the best bloke ever. He died a decade ago, from lung cancer. He knew he had the cancer for a year before he died, but never told anyone. "Of course, my mum and I knew something was wrong. But every time he came back from the doctor he would say: 'All clear. Everything's fine.' My mum and I were about to go and see the GP for ourselves when he collapsed and was rushed into hospital. In hospital, full of morphine, I could see he was frightened, but he was still the bravest man I have ever known."

No, he doesn't feel he's ever measured up to his dad. "If I were terminally ill, I'd want everyone to know and feel sorry for

"The modern working-class think they have a right to everything the world has to offer. They go about sucking it all up."

leaned over and said something pithy like: "I'm going to your country soon." They married six years ago and will probably have kids soon. They didn't earlier because they didn't want to make Bobby feel pushed out.

Tony loves Yuriko, yes. Did he love Julie? "Of course, I married her." But, after a pause, he adds: "It was me who slept with someone else first, so perhaps I didn't."

He is, of course, flashily turned out. Paul Smith shirt. Tag Heuer watch. So much Calvin Klein scent it makes you almost queasy. We go for a Vietnamese meal. He drinks Perrier while I get tipsy. He then gives me a lift home in his big, new, silver Audi and comes in for a cup of tea. The George Michael book earned him £250,000 alone. But, no having all this doesn't make him less working class.

"Class isn't about who you are now. It's about where you have come from." Do you have a Dualit toaster, I ask. "Yes, how do you know?" he asks. I just guessed. I say, "Well, I needed a new toaster, so I went to Heal's, and all they had were Du-

me." He recently penned a vicious attack on the modern working class. "Something has died in the working class: a sense of grace, feelings of the community... the salt of the earth have become the scum of the earth, a huge tribe of tattooed white trash. Today the working class are peasants..."

It is Parsons at his savage best. But, still, I wonder if it's fair. Wonder if his longing for his dad hasn't become confused with a resentment for those that remain. He insists not. "There used to be a nobility that just isn't around anymore. The modern working class think they have the right to everything the world has to offer. They go about sucking it all up. Monkeys. Nintendo. Take a walk down the Holloway Road. Look at the kids. They're in Calvin Klein." But, Tony, you're in Calvin Klein! "I earned it. I never thought I had a right to it."

It occurs to me now that perhaps there is some guilt in here too. Tony got out. He moves in another world now. Maybe it makes him feel better to think he didn't leave much behind.

He was a grammar school boy, but

packed it in at 16. "I felt like an overgrown schoolboy. I wanted to be out in the world." That meant Gordon's Gin Distillery in Islington, where he worked the night shift as a computer operator. There were perks. You could drink all the gin you could, plus, you could bunk off for a few hours in the middle of the night. Tony used to go to punk clubs.

"In those days, when you had no money, there were only two things you could do - go to Dunkin' Donuts or see the Sex Pistols at the 100 Club."

It was the first stirring of punk. The NME, knowing it would have to cover it, advertised for "hip young gunslingers". They got 5,000 applications and first to get a job was Tony, by now 22.

He'd always wanted to be a writer. His mother's brothers were all Fleet Street printers who loved books. As a kid, they gave him Ian Fleming and Conan Doyle.

He had his first piece published when he was 10, in a Jimmy Hill football magazine. "I think it was about why Leeds played dirty." The second person to be taken on was a 16-year-old Bristol schoolgirl called Julie Burchill. They first met in the NME office. "We were the two winners of the beauty contest. We were given a desk together. In the drawers, were all these applications no one had even bothered to open."

They married just after her eighteenth birthday, and had Bobby. They did speed and cocaine and everything bar heroin. "Because we knew that was just throwing your life down the toilet." They were, he thinks, reasonably OK until one night he went to give a talk at University of East Anglia and one of the students "got a bonus, a shag from me". No, he didn't tell Julie. The girl did, in a letter. He remembers Julie receiving the letter, looking up at him, "and just staring and staring."

She left shortly afterwards, and he hasn't spoken to her since. How did he explain her departure to Bobby?

"After her visits tailed off, he understood. It didn't need explaining." He's had a hard time with fidelity. "My girlfriend after Julie was quite Freudian and made me go to couple counselling. It was interesting, but it didn't stop me sleeping around." Has he stopped now? "Oh, yes. When you truly love someone, their happiness comes before your own." Possibly, Tony has grown up in a way Julie never did.

Post-NME, Tony languished while Julie flourished. She became the highest-paid woman on Fleet Street while he turned out rubbish novels about tennis and pop and power lunches. He was saved by the sudden burgeoning of men's style magazines, like *Arena*, where he quickly became a regular. This led to a column in the *Daily Telegraph*, and now one on the *Daily Mirror*. He rates himself quite highly. "I want to be remembered as a Keith Waterhouse or Paul Foot..."

He finishes his cup of tea. He says he must be off. "Let me know if you want Doris's number." I call out after him.

"And you let me know if you want any cockles or whelks or anything," he shouts back.

coming up



From Tatton to Bonk Inc... every Monday, a quirky look at the week ahead

Wedding bells

THERE can only be one reason why Robin and Gynor Cook spared us the details of their wedding by sneaking off to a register office earlier this month. They knew the only political wedding of any interest is that of Martin Bell's daughter which takes place on Sunday. Melissa Bell, 24, met her fiancé, Peter Bracken, while they worked on her father's election campaign in Tatton. The former army major proposed last year while Miss Bell was cooking a pasta supper in his flat. It was first thought the wedding might take place at Mr Bell's parish church in Great Budworth, but it transpired that the vicar of All Saints had come out as a "Hamiltonian" by printing a letter in support of the sleaze-tarnished Tory candidate in the parish newsletter. The venue is now set as St Oswald's Church in the nearby village of Lower Peover. The only question that remains is whether the father of the bride will wear white.

Frost byte

SENIOR Labour party figures will be dressing up on Friday for celebrations of a different kind. An official bash is being held in Newcastle to mark the first anniversary of Labour's election victory. The Prime Minister will not be there because he is due to host a dinner for European finance ministers in Brussels. But before he gets to Belgium, Tony Blair will have to prove his worldwide web-cred when on Wednesday he faces a live Internet interview. Sir David Frost will choose a selection of questions from those e-mailed by the general public. While there is no suggestion that William Hague's week will be any less hi-tech, the highlight will come on Wednesday when he joins Chris Eubank and John Redwood for a luncheon award ceremony in Knightsbridge. All three have won the distinguished title of 1998 top tie-wearers.



Female football

CROYDON is not a name that trips off the tongue when recalling FA Cup winning sides, that is unless you are talking about the Women's FA Cup. On Thursday, Croydon WFC will take on Arsenal Ladies in a league match which should prove an important guide to next week's final in which the two teams face each other again. Now in its 27th year, and its 6th under the Football Association, the Cup Final is expected to attract a crowd of 5,000 to Millwall FC's New Den. The teams have already faced each other in the League Cup Final when Arsenal ladies won on penalties after a scoreless draw.

Plain bonkers

CONTEMPORARY Finnish Artist Alvar Guliksen thinks his countrymen take corporate culture too seriously and to prove his point he has created a spoof company called Bonk Inc. His bizarre work will be exhibited at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford from Friday. The parody includes posters from Bonk's marketing campaigns and displays of one of Bonk's most successful products, the Hot Anchovy Oil Applicator. Visitors to the opening of Bonk Inc will be able to sample produce from the company vineyard - Chateau Bonk.



Michael Greenwood

THE INDEPENDENT

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Should we listen to the vigilantes?

THERE WAS a theatrical symbolism about the scene in Yeovil last week, when Paddy Ashdown struggled to make himself heard above the shouts of the crowd in the Liberal Democrat Club hall. Hollywood scriptwriters would have a good time with it, pulling in opposite directions at the sympathies of their audience. On the one hand, the heroic upholder of liberal principle, defending the rule of law and trying to reassure by cool, reasoned argument. On the other, mothers with toddlers in pushchairs, frightened and angry, turned into a baying mob by their frustration at a politician's inability to guarantee their children's protection.

Mr Ashdown said he did not know if the paedophile Sidney Cooke was being held in their local police station. He was booed and heckled. He said the protest was hindering the finding of a long-term residence for Mr Cooke. They called him "pompous".

Mr Cooke is a child murderer who has just been released from prison, but who is still regarded by the police as a danger to children. He is being held in a police station somewhere in the Avon and Somerset police region, but the police do not want to say where because it would be under siege within minutes. In Bristol on Thursday a peaceful protest outside another police station was hijacked by youths throwing stones and petrol bombs.

There is rarely a question so difficult that vigilantes are the right answer, but the anger of Yeovil parents is entirely understandable and justifiable. The problem is that, legally, Cooke is free to go. He may have the sense to appreciate that, with a face almost as recognisable as the Prime Minister's, he is better off where he is. He may have agreed to be electronically tagged. The police are sure that he poses "no threat whatever" to the public. But that is an opinion. It is not a legally enforceable guarantee.

It is not the habit of liberal newspapers to stand up for a baying crowd. But, if a dangerous paedophile turned up at any neighbourhood slammer, free to walk, every local parent would be, to go to the root of the word, vigilant.

There is no real danger of mob rule asserting itself, either in Bristol or Yeovil, but politicians should be more sensitive to a failure of their authority. The failure of the Belgian state to maintain a secure hold on Marc Dutroux, a convicted child murderer still serving his sentence, has plunged the Brussels government into crisis. Jack Straw has a smaller problem with Mr Cooke and the tiny handful of other paedophiles who continue to pose a threat to children after their convictions are spent. But it is a problem which nevertheless threatens public confidence in the rule of law.

The philosophical objections should be swept aside. Is it right, the purists ask, to lock someone up for something they might do, rather than for something they have done? For a government which promised to be tough on preventing crime before it is committed, Mr Straw has been slow coming up with an answer. Especially as it is so obviously yes. Yes, if the potential crime is as serious as child murder. And yes, if there is a testable case for saying that there is a significant danger that the crime will be attempted.

Both conditions appear to be satisfied in the Cooke case, and yet Mr Straw has not, amid all the measures he outlined yesterday, set out a convincing mechanism for dealing with it. The new "sex offenders orders" currently going through parliament are still too weak and essentially retrospective in effect. If – and only if – former sex offenders act in a way which suggests children are at risk, can the police apply for court orders to keep away from school playgrounds and suchlike; and they can only be arrested if they break the orders.

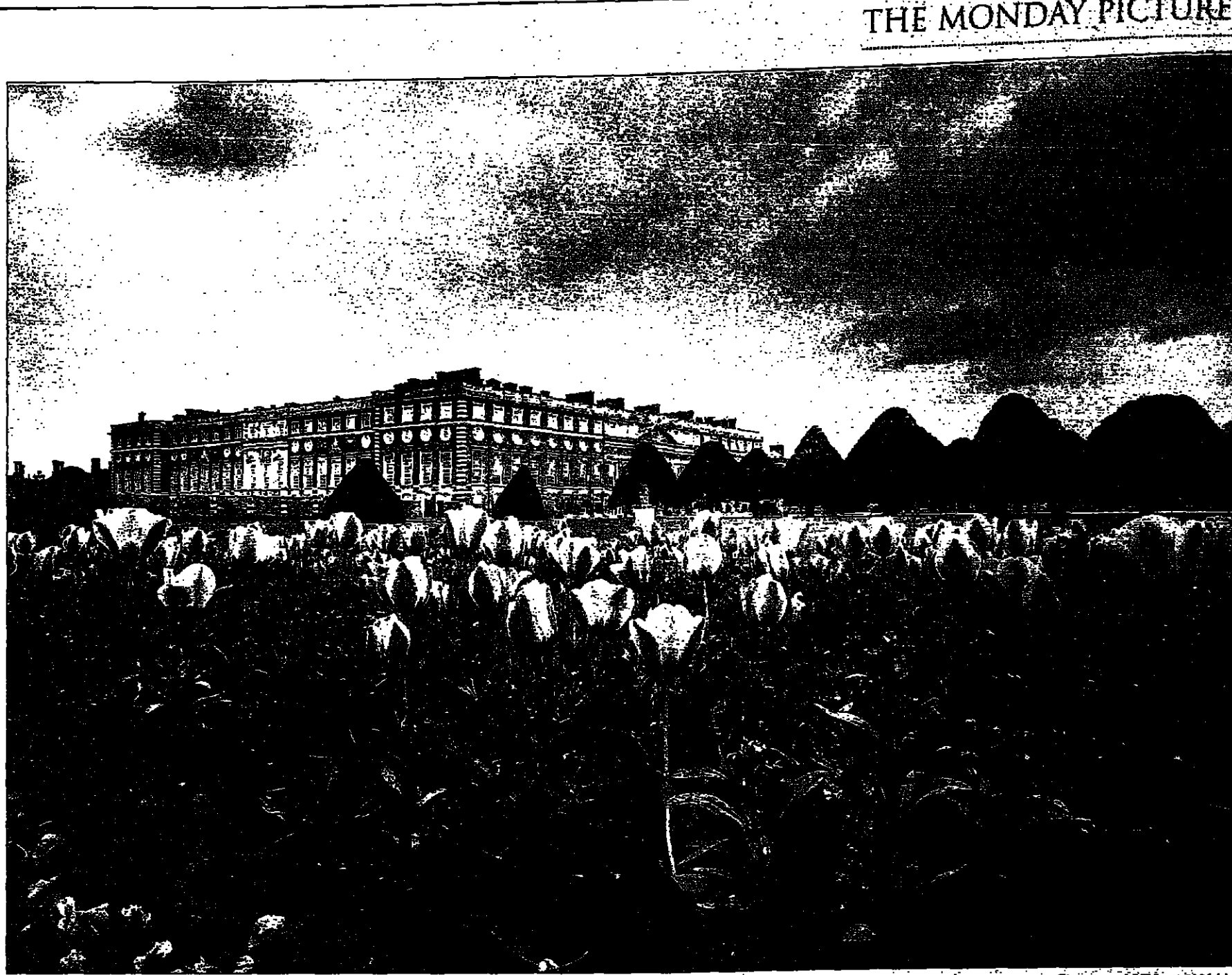
So far, the government is only "considering" the idea of "indeterminate custodial sentences" for paedophiles. Sections of the tabloid press could be criticised for whipping up "hysteria", as Mr Ashdown put it, but the fact remains that paedophilia is a special case. Sexual obsession with children can be a pattern of behaviour that is hard to break, control, or even monitor. The normal rules of justice do not apply. It should be possible to assess the small number of men like Mr Cooke when they come up for release and decide whether or not they pose a threat. If they do – a verdict which could be challenged in court as with mental health detentions – then they should stay locked up. A policy of total containment does not come cheap, but it is necessary.

The Government needs to listen to Yeovil's angry citizens and understand that these are the people's priorities. One said: "We have not been listened to, we have been talked at." It is time now to listen.

A prang on the road to green policy

IN ALL the libraries of television footage, politicians accumulate the images by which they are remembered. The same short sequences called up again and again for end-of-year reviews, profiles, retirements and finally obituaries. Margaret Thatcher will forever be riding that tank, scarf billowing, across the German plain. John Prescott, we suspect, will forever be driving that solar-powered car.

It was an image that said it all: the great big gas-guzzler himself, squeezed into the racing-car cockpit. The behemoth of coal-fired, tax-and-spend labourism, squeezed into the environmentally-friendly, clean blue, silent vehicle of the future. Never mind that the solar panels were mock-ups, and it was powered by dirty, mains-charged batteries. It was a visual metaphor for the ambiguities of a green transport policy – the subject of last week-end's European Union ministers' meeting in Chester. The ministers did not even travel by train (because they would have had to change at Crewe, like the rest of us). They went in a fleet of big cars from Manchester airport. But then the deputy prime minister got in his solar-powered buggy for the cameras. And, of course, he pranged it.



Britain in bloom: tulips at Hampton Court Palace, in Surrey

Photograph: Edward Webb

A lynch mob mentality

THE SPECTACLE of two released prisoners forced into continued detention by the antics of increasingly lawless mobs is medieval. Sidney Cooke and Robert Oliver have paid their debt to society. Yet both have been coerced into forfeiting their liberty, for fear of being lynched ("Vigilantes target child-killers", 25 April). It is notable that none of those demonstrating did anything when the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) reduced Sidney Cooke's sentence for the manslaughter of Jason Swift from 19 years to 16.

What is disturbing is the way in which those in authority pander to this "lynch mob" mentality. Rather than tackle the more difficult question of how to protect unpopular individuals from communal aggression, they prefer to appease an ignorant and hysterical section of public opinion. Indeed, the fact that men who are entitled to their liberty are forced to give it up would in my view warrant a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

Not so long ago, people advised their children not to talk to strangers and that was considered sufficient. What are these parents so afraid of? That they will encounter Cooke and Oliver working in the local school? That their children will be turned into rent boys? This obsession with undefined risks obscures that fact that most child abuse is carried out by parents of close relatives, not by strangers. It also begs the question: why should anyone expect a 100 per cent risk-free environment in which to bring up children?

BARBARA HEWSON
Barrister-at-law
London WC1

Sanctions against Iraq

IN JUSTIFYING the present sanctions regime against Iraq, Derek Fatchett (letter, 22 April) speaks of "the will of the international community to hold Saddam Hussein to his promises". Clearly, the Foreign Office for which he speaks limits the "international community" to the

Anglo-Saxon world, given the reluctance of almost all other countries to support last month's narrowly averted bombardment of Iraq. Mr Fatchett's narrow definition excludes Muslims *a fortiori*. It is apparently of no relevance to him that the million-odd civilian deaths in Iraq ensuing from the policies he advocates are interpreted throughout the Islamic world as further proof that the West cannot view Muslims as full human beings.

If the West is to persuade the Islamic world that its policies are grounded in principle rather than in the enjoyment of the mass liquidation of children, it should reverse its present policy which, as Mr Fatchett states, is not to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Saddam is in power thanks to the West's fear of Iranian Islam in the 1980s, and its fear of Iraqi Islam in the 1990s. But if the West shows an ability to trust non-Western peoples to manage their own destinies, it may win their confidence and their hearts, and discover that there is nothing to fear at all.

HOSSEIN DANESHVAR
London NW11

DEREK FATCHETT writes that "People often assume that sanctions are designed to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Not so."

One of the reasons for this perception is statements made in the past by the highest ranking US and British officials. However, as Mr Fatchett rightly observes, it would be wrong to assume that current policy has as its goal the overthrow of Saddam. A more likely motive for the indefinite continuation of the embargo – regardless of the amount of suffering it causes – was offered to Robert Fisk ("Better to be bombed", 22 February) by an Arab statistician: "If sanctions were lifted Saddam could sell [Iraq's oil] at \$9 a barrel,

just to bring the price down... [this] would devalue British North Sea Oil, undermine American oil production and – more important – it would destroy the huge profits the United States stands to gain from its massive investment in Caucasian oil production."

Meanwhile, Iraq's population remains trapped between a rock and a hard place.

GABRIEL CARLYLE
Junior Research Fellow
Magdalen College, Oxford

Lives ruined by addiction

THERE IS one major consideration missing from the "utilitarian" argument for legalising drugs put forward by David Aaronovitch (Comment, 23 April).

When you consider the time and effort people put into becoming addicted to nicotine – a drug with little discernible narcotic effect – how many more are going to become addicted to highly narcotic drugs like cocaine and heroin if they are freely available? Nicotine and alcohol are often compared unfavourably with recreational drugs because of their greater detrimental effect on both individual and society, but how much of this is as a result of their legality and general availability?

What it comes down to is this – how many additional lives is David Aaronovitch prepared to see ruined by addiction in order to stop his car radio being stolen?

There is, I'm afraid, a parallel argument against the legalisation of cannabis which I take from personal experience. Every person I know who is a regular cannabis user is now addicted – not to cannabis but to tobacco.

PETE BARRETT
Colchester, Essex

Bus chaos theory

INTERESTING and scientifically plausible as Charles Arthur's explanation (Science, 23 April) of the triple-bus phenomenon is, the theory is not in practice sufficient to explain all the evidence. It does not explain, for example, why bus route instability affects only British buses and leaves French, Spanish and German services (in my experience) unaffected.

As a seasoned catcher of buses at or near their point of departure, I would suggest that undisciplined bus operators are a much more significant cause of buses travelling in threes: it is almost unknown for a London bus to leave its station at the correct time, and I have frequently observed two or three buses of the same service leaving at the same time.

NEIL JERRAM
London NW4

Followers of Krishna

YOUR report on the opening of a Hindu temple in Delhi (13 April) reflects a lack of understanding of the subject matter. Vaishnavism is one of the three main branches of Hinduism. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) belongs to the orthodox Bengali Vaishnava tradition which dates back immediately to the 15th century and participates in a tradition dating back to antiquity. Most of ISKCON's congregation are born into this tradition.

ISKCON does not revere only the *Bhagavadgita*. We place equal importance on the *Bhagavat Purana* and the *Caitanya-Caritamrita* and draw upon a wealth of other Vedic texts for inspiration. Our tradition also teaches respect for the scriptures of all bona fide religious traditions.

ANURADHA DAS
ISKCON
Weyford, Hertfordshire

An English patron saint

YOU suggest (leading article, 24 April) that England needs a new patron saint. Our saint before that mythical Balkan mercenary St George was Edmund, an Englishman, a king and a Christian martyr, shot through by Danish arrows on 20 November AD 869. His tomb became the principal shrine for English pilgrims for hundreds of years.

Even in 1214, it was on St Edmund's tomb in the Abbey of St Edmundsbury that 20 barons and other nobles chose to swear to have King John's guts for garters if he did not renew their traditional charter of rights. That he did, most recently, the next year in Runnymede. Perhaps it is time that we returned to having a native Englishman as our patron saint.

SIR REGINALD E W HARLAND
Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Jefferies not forgotten

LORD HEALEY'S World Book Day recollections (23 April) will have struck a happy note with all lovers of Richard Jefferies and his book *Revis: the story of a boy*. Let me reassure them that Jefferies is not "forgotten": the reservoir on which Bevis sailed still exists at Coate, near Swindon; and the 150th anniversary of Jefferies' birth will be celebrated there in August this year. Bevis is still in print.

PHYLLIS TRETTEL

The Richard Jefferies Society
Oxford

Toys for little boys

IN THE 1960s I had a similar dilemma to John O'Byrne (letter, 21 April), who worries about violent computer games. My three sons were reaching the age of wanting toys. It was only when a wise friend pointed out that it was better that they used toys rather than the real thing that I allowed them to have their pistols, rifles, machine-guns etc. Thirty years later, when I see the sort of people they have turned out to be, I know I made the right decision.

BERNARD FOX
Hove, East Sussex



MILES KINGDON

It's only natural: bats in the belfry, mice in the church, and celebs on TV quiz shows

"I SAW an article about a programme in the *Radio Times* the other day," said the man in the pub.

"Amazing," said a man with a dog.

"What's amazing about it?" said the man at the bar.

"Finding an article about a programme in the *Radio Times*. All I can ever find is articles about what little-known actors like to eat when watching TV."

"Be that as it may," said the man at the bar (meaning "if you interrupt again I'll shoot you"). "This article trailed a forthcoming nature programme in which a team of nature experts studied an empty house for a long period in order to see what wildlife would occupy it after the humans had departed."

"Interesting," said the woman with red hair and a matching Campari. "And what did they find?"

"I don't know," said the man at the bar. "I didn't read the article. But I knew the answer already. You see, I once heard a BBC Radio nature programme from somewhere

like Cardiff in which they compared two neighbouring houses, one occupied and one empty, to see which one had the most wildlife. And the surprising discovery was that the empty house had no wildlife, and the occupied house was teeming with it."

"Really?" said the Campari lady. "Why?"

"Because human occupation proves warmth, light, dirt, food, scraps, crumbs, water and everything you might need if you were an ant or a mouse or spider or fly or..."

"Yes, yes, we get the idea," said the man with the dog. "So are you saying that this other programme you read about, the one studying the empty house, will find no wildlife there?"

"Yes, I am."

"You're saying that they're going to stand up at the start of the programme and say, 'Well, folks, in making this programme about all the wildlife in an empty house, we looked and looked and I'm sorry to say there was no wildlife anywhere in the house, so here's a repeat of *Absolutely Fabulous* instead?'"

"Yes."

"That doesn't make sense," said a man with a folded-up evening paper, who always interrupted conversations at about this point. "There are plenty of other possibilities. One, your programme in Cardiff may have got it wrong."

"Unlikely," said the resident Welshman.

"Two, the people making the programme may have imported lots of wildlife into the empty house in order to avoid embarrassment. Three, you get bats in belfries, don't you?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Churches are empty houses, scarcely ever occupied and never heated. But you get bats, and birds, and church mice..."

"They eat the candles," said the vicar, who was still sober.

"That's not all," said the Campari lady. "You also get death watch beetle, and woodworm, and termites, and..."

"Don't get termites in Britain," said the man with the dog.

"They found some the other day for the first time," said the Campari lady triumphantly. "I heard it on the radio."

"On the news?"

"Not on the News Quiz. All the best news is on the News Quiz. Better class of celeb, too."

"Didn't have termites when the Tories were in power," said someone else.

"Didn't have the word 'celebs' when I was a young man," said the man at the bar, who looked as though rationing was still going when he was a young man. "What is a celeb?"

"It's a person who is famous enough to go on the panel of a quiz show but not famous enough to go on *Desert Island Discs*."

said the man with the dog.

"A celeb is someone you recognise but can't put a name to."

"A celeb is someone who lives on after the soap opera which made him famous has died."

"A celeb is someone who is famous

enough to be asked a question on a TV quiz show, but not famous enough to be the subject of a question on a TV quiz show," said the man with the paper.

They thought about this for a while.

"That's quite good," said the Welshman, "but by the time you've worked out what it means, it's no longer funny."

"Didn't have the word 'cool' when I was a young man," said the man at the bar, trying to wrest the conversation back. "Cool Britannia. Huh!"

"What about 'cool' jazz?" said the jazz bore. "That was 1950s vintage..."

Everyone ignored him. Then the man with the paper pointed it at me.

"Why are you writing so hard and not saying anything?"

"I'm doing research for an article," I said. "I want to study a totally unoccupied pub conversation and see if there is any sign of life in it."

"Buy us a round," said the man at the bar, "and we'll see what we can do."

هكذا من الأمل

Make sure you count your change in the post-Euro world

JOHN REDWOOD
WHEN THE NEW
TILLS RING

AT THE END of this week, Europe will sign up to momentous events. The member states of the European Union will decide officially to fix their exchange rates and prepare for a new currency. British exporters will be relieved to know that we are not about to join them. Few here wish us to fix our rate at around 3DM to the pound in perpetuity.

This is not the first time Europe has decided to fix exchange rates. The first attempt was the "Snake". It broke out of its skin in the 1970s. The second was the narrow band ERM, which exploded when the rest could not stand the German pace in 1992. Now we have the third idea, locking rates before abolishing the currencies.

Do you fancy doing business in euros? From next January you will be able to. Some may have to. From next Sunday, the European state will have agreed the exchange rates that are to be used until the individual national currencies disappear on 30 June, 2002. It is time business here prepared for the coming euro, if they have not already done so. Many in the City are rightly licking their lips at the thought of euro business.

You cannot be sure when, or if, you will have to use the euro in your business when dealing with customers and suppliers on the continent. Companies in Europe are free to decide when they will switch over to the euro, or if they will deal in both the euro and their existing currency, between 1 Jan 1999 and 30 June 2002. Shops on the continent face a more difficult task. They must offer shoppers both euro and national currency shopping for the first six months of 2002.

It is a great opportunity for British computer and till specialists. Every shop on the continent will have to double its number of tills to handle either currency for the transition, or modify its existing tills to take both European and national notes and coins.

There will need to be plenty of planning to be ready for this event by January 2002. Everything will need to be double-priced. Shopkeepers will have to decide how to handle the customer who wants to pay in a mixture of national currency and euros – difficult if they have separate tills for the two currencies. It would be just my luck to be queuing at the till behind someone with a fistful of mixed coinage.

The nearest we have got to doing something like this was when Britain went decimal. We made it much easier than the euro will be. All the bankers stayed the same. The higher denomination coins, such as the one and two shillings, doubled up as 5p and 10p pieces. It was only the three small-value coins that changed. And they all changed on the same day, so there was no need to have double tills, or to switch from one to the other in a shop. Even so, it took time and plenty of expenditure to get ready. Many thought that decimalisation drove

prices up. The euro could pose a bigger problem for early pricing as the main unit changes in value as well as the small units. A euro is worth 6.66 French francs at today's exchange rates. How will a French retailer price something currently priced at 11.99 francs? Will he charge 1.8 euros, the exact amount on conversion, or will he be tempted to preserve the 99-style pricing by charging 1.99 euros, an increase of just over 10 per cent? If that one seems a little steep, what about 12.99 francs? Will that become 1.95 euros or will that be rounded up to 1.99 euros? There are temptations, particularly as people will take time to adjust their sense of values.

British business has to watch out for new problems from the use of the euro by their customers. Some powerful customers may decide that this is the time to force the British supplier to take the currency risk. If you currently sell in pounds to a German customer, he may propose that in future you sell in euros. This transfers the risk of sterling changing value from the customer to the British supplier. The British business would be wise to try to resist this, but some will be offered little choice.

Changing over all the computers will also present some problems. Sensible companies are trying to fix the millennium bug and the euro at the same time. If you want your company to handle euros in the Commission-approved way it will be an expensive reprogramming job. The system has to work to six places of decimals and do the sums in a particular way.

It is going to be interesting seeing how the markets take it all. The European Economic and Social Committee has warned that the foreign exchange markets might be turbulent. They may not accept the proposed rates for all the European currencies. The member states do not control the markets. The central banks of the system have not made clear what they will do if the markets rates get out of the line with the proposed rates.

"The nearest we have ever got to doing something like this was when Britain went decimal. Many thought that decimalisation drove prices up."

If they are serious about holding the line, the central banks will have to buy or sell as much as it takes to hold the rates. Will they do so? Can they manage the impact this will have on their home economies? This is a super ERM, where no divergencies are permitted at all.

Can it all work? No one should underestimate the political will behind this scheme. The more currencies and countries that join, the bigger the risk. It is quite possible that Austria, Germany, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg have come together enough to make it feasible for them. But have the others?

The market will test this out over the long months ahead before the new coins appear in the shops. In the meantime, there are business opportunities for Britain in helping the others gear up and making the markets that will make or break the system.

The writer is Opposition spokesman on Trade and Industry.

Germany is unified at last – they all agree Helmut Kohl must go



**ANNE
MCELVOY**

DANGER FROM
THE EAST

HELMUT KOHL in full flow is an awesome sight. Eight years ago, in Magdeburg, Saxony-Anhalt, I stood in the middle of a crowd of East Germans listening to him speak. As the sun sank behind the high rise flats, the Chancellor thundered in his distinctive nasal lisp. "We will bring you flourishing landscapes." This clever concatenation of economic and ecological promise held seductive appeal in cities where the factories were bankrupt and the pollution so bad that breathing in should have carried a health warning. He won a resounding victory and unification was completed the same year.

In Magdeburg and elsewhere, the landscapes stubbornly refused to flourish. In the next general election of 1994, the Chancellor more modestly pledged to deliver "green shoots of hope". I like to imagine that, in the Christian Democrats' HQ, the search is on for an even more tentative metaphor for this election year – something about the compost being in fine fettle, perhaps. Nowadays, Saxony-Anhalt ranks as the "state of catastrophe" – the distilled worst of the East with its galloping unemployment, crumbling estates and racial violence.

Columnists are usually well-advised to avoid pre-empting election results. One unexpected shift in a key marginal could finish me off as *The Independent's* Mystic Meg for good. But it is more likely that Chancellor Kohl will succumb to anorexia nervosa than that his party's fortunes will have recovered in Saxony-Anhalt's regional Sunday vote by the time you read this. So I'll take the chance and prophesy that the result will be another disaster for his Christian Democratic Party and that this will be a significant step towards his demise after 16 years in power.

The former East Germany has made Kohl's political fortunes in the 1990s. In the last election of 1994, his coalition won by a ten-seat majority on its residual loyalty. But the same people who cried "Hel-



"I declare myself unemployed" – an East German protester points out problems that could spell the end of the Chancellor's 16-year career at the heart of European politics

Photograph: Rex Features

mut! Helmut!", as if their saviour had come among them when he first campaigned in the East, will vote against him this year.

This will be a bitter fate for a man who, in Bismarck's image, "seized the coat-tail of history" to unify his country within a year after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The psychological effect on him was startling. Unification transformed him from a stolid party manager – the sort of politician who stops things happening – into the kind of visionary politician who is always running after the next big project. It also convinced him that his will could always be made reality.

On he strode, vowing to become the Chancellor of European integration. Little attention was paid to the far more pressing task of integrating two mutually suspicious societies at home. But then Kohl has never had much empathy for individual East Germans.

The Christian Democrats avoided the place like the plague. German has a splendid compound-noun for this state of mind – *Berührungsangst* – nervous fear of contact with something unfamiliar. In the wake of unification, the *B* word accounted for Kohl's swift dispatch of East Germans from political life. The first and symbolically most important was Lothar de Maizière, a quiet lawyer who became head of the East's Christian Democrats and was then ousted from national politics on the grounds that he had contacts with the

communist secret services. Well, there are contacts and contacts. Lawyers in East Germany specializing – as de Maizière did – in securing the release of political prisoners had contacts with state security. Some certainly abused this and acted more in the interests of the state than the people they defended. Others did not. Sifting the one for the other pre-

Those who once treated Kohl as a saviour will now vote against him

sents a moral dilemma, but one in which I have no hesitation in coming down on the side of de Maizière. The precedent that Kohl set in dismissing his party colleague from public life and wielding a Stasi file as the fatal weapon, discouraged east Germans from taking part in public life. Even the young decided not to risk a future in which their past could be used against them.

An acquaintance who was regarded as one of the coming generation of politicians from the East called me recently from Essex where he was busy privatizing water on behalf of a French company. The young man's journey behind the Iron Curtain to running the privatized utilities in New Britain is a testament to the wondrous

changes wrought by 1989 in Europe. But what had become of his ambition to be the first Chancellor from the East? He told me that he felt his past would be seen as a liability and not an asset. So he had quit politics – and reeled off a dispiritingly long list of other bright thirty-somethings of whom I once wrote confident profiles entitled, "Unified Germany's future leaders" who had done the same.

Chancellor Kohl's party has thus left itself short of people who can campaign in places like Magdeburg on the basis of a shared past. The strategists know that it is too late to redress this. They intend to make the general election's battle ground western Germany, where voters are better informed and thus more doubtful about the capabilities of the Social Democrats.

But the latest news from the front is intriguingly bad. Every year since the 1970s, a sample of West Germans is asked to rate equality/social justice and liberty in order of desirability. Throughout the Kohl years, the verdict has been on the side of liberty by a large margin. East Germans – consulted after 1990 – defined the priorities the other way round. In the last year, however, a significant number of western Germans

said they preferred the pursuit of equality and downgraded liberty. "The West," concluded an analyst, "seems to be adopting the political psychology of the East and not the other way round." In other words, high unemployment and the imminent sacrifice of the Deutschmark are making formerly confident west Germans feel as insecure as the easterners, timid novices in capitalism. They are reaching for the same deceptive certainties that east Germans inherited from state socialism.

This voters' coalition of disillusion spells big trouble for big Helmut. In crude electoral terms, a swing towards the desire for more equality benefits the Social Democrats. Fittingly, a kind of East-West unity looks likely to deliver the *coup de grace*. The two parts of Germany, which have remained so stubbornly divided from one another's concerns and sensibilities for the past eight years have finally found something on which they can agree – Helmut Kohl must go.

His successor will inherit a country which has voted for change at the top in the hope of being spared change in the way that it thinks and works. His first task will be to disabuse the country of the notion that the future will be that easy.

Will the Prime Minister raise a cheer for men?



**JACK
O'SULLIVAN**

FIRST-CLASS
BLOKES

TONY BLAIR wants to offer leadership on the future of men. He has read the endless stories vilifying us as problems (criminals, dead-beat dads, lads behaving badly) or pitying us for having a problem (poor job prospects, low self-esteem, suicidal tendencies). He wants to do something. So, as we report today, we face a campaign, fronted by Jack Straw, to improve parenting, introduce mentoring for boys and post-school training for the unemployed to make sure we don't end up as jobless no-hopers.

Good, but not good enough. We need more than these second-hand policies springing out of vilification and pity. We require the Prime Minister's

substantial skills at spelling out a dream, an exciting aspiration. We need politicians like him to mount platforms and tell us the truth. Which is that this is potentially a great time to be a guy. Perhaps the best in centuries. It is certainly no time to hang our heads in shame. Rather this is a moment to hold them high, feel confident and grasp the great opportunities denied our fathers.

To all the many vocal critics of men and the growing army of whingers in the so-called "men's movement", this may sound like a bizarre statement. They are variously hooked on notions of men as incorrigibly bad or of men as sad victims. Popular culture only strengthens such images. As one commentator said of recent films, they confirm the worst male archetypes – the bastard (*The Company of Men*), the misanthrope (Jack Nicholson in *As Good As It Gets*), the corrupt (Mel Gibson in *Ransom*), the cads (men claiming first place in *Titanic's* life boats), the wimpish fool (Kevin Kline in *The Ice Storm*) and the paedophile (Jeremy Irons as Humbert Humbert in *Loisla*).

But these images miss the big picture. They fail to show that the late twentieth century offers men enormous freedom to break away from the past. As the cultural boundaries dictating what a man can and cannot

do collapse, much is possible for the first time. We can escape our age-old limitations, most notably that narrow definition of ourselves just as workers, a representation that has left us so vulnerable when unemployed, sick or retired.

At last we have the chance to live up to the historic, aspirational notion of what it is to be a real man – able, free, unlimited, unbounded. It is now culturally acceptable for us to do most things: be it care for our children (there are already

He should tell the truth – that this is perhaps the best time ever to be a guy

150,000 single fathers, who are looking after their own offspring), or care for ourselves in every way, physically, emotionally and practically. The new millennium will produce some of the most capable, self-sufficient, mature men in human history. Real men.

The nature of these real men will be a focus of debate for a long time. We will not simply become like women. The expansion of male capacities will not merely be a triumph of the unisex being. It will also build on the biological differ-

ences between men and women which are increasingly being identified by science as sources of strengths and weaknesses rather than of inequality.

So why are the Prime Minister and others not standing up on public platforms to set out the great opportunities ahead? Perhaps he is worried that any celebration of maleness will be misunderstood in an age that perceives masculinity as essentially negative and oppressive. What a shame for all the young men, not least his two

sons, who desperately need such a public statement of ambition and hope.

Another reason is the work issue. Real men of the future know that work can be a trap, a way of keeping us in our strait-jackets, preventing us living the broad lives we might otherwise enjoy. Hard though it is, we need to get it into our heads that work is less important than we have always been led to believe. Not least so that, when we have no jobs, we do not collapse in a heap or head for a life of crime.

But this challenge to the work ethic is difficult for New Labour to accept or articulate. Because the primacy of work is Tony Blair's best card. It features in most of his speeches. It puts him at ease with the agenda of the women's movement, for which greater access to work is the number one, over-riding principle. No-one could have listened to Gordon Brown's Budget without spotting the Chancellor's obsession with work.

But there is an additional problem. The Prime Minister, more than many in his cabinet, is a modern man, in that, despite the strains of office, he has always set aside time for his family life. But he remains a transitional figure between the old and the new. His ways still reflect an age when to prove your masculinity all you had to do was be successful in the public sphere, chiefly the world of work. Britain's male élites still have little reason to question these values because, though a dying breed, they have made it.

Of course, they still like to make themselves look modern and dynamic. So many of them attach themselves to the women's movement, speak a feminist language and sponsor women to achieve the success that they rightly deserve in the public world. To these canny "old" men, there seems to be nothing more modern-looking

than politicians joining the general haranguing of unsuccessful men who flounder about without a sense of purpose or vision. It is so easy to moralise and describe such men in the same disparaging terms as New Labour's political opponents often represent "the feckless poor".

By creating a distance between themselves and unsuccessful men, male politicians can burnish themselves with the shine that women enjoy in modern culture. But they are not fooling anyone. Social change will catch up even with them. They will be able to avoid only for a little longer the questions of male redefinition that their less employable, less skilled contemporaries already face.

It is hard in general for men to talk about themselves. Which is why we have failed so dramatically to create a project for ourselves. We need thoughtful, modernising politicians to herald the great future we have. The Prime Minister could start by taking away his initiative from Jack Straw, who, as Home Secretary, is the punitive face of government and so gives entirely the wrong image. Offer the task instead to Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture. He is one man, at least, who has given some genuine thought to the liberating possibilities of masculinity.

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Douglas Johnson
Jean-François Lyzard, philosopher, born Versailles, France, 10 Aug. 1924; married (one son, two daughters); died, Paris, 21 April 1979.

Steve Voce
James Richard Skidmore, tenor saxophonist: born London 8 February 1915; married (one son); died Welwyn, Hertfordshire 23 April 1998.

Kenneth Powell
Christopher Michael Dean, architect,
born Bromborough, Cheshire 29 Sep-
tember 1927; married 1957 May
Hamblin (one son, two daughters;
died London 15 April 1998).

Calderón was a gifted teacher. He taught at Ohio State University, MIT (the Massachusetts Institute of Technology), the University of Buenos Aires and the University of Chicago. He had many PhD students, both in the United States and in Argentina. In Argentina, he also served, for several years, as Director of the Instituto Argentino de Matemática (IAM).

Calderón was recognised all over the world for his outstanding contributions to mathematics. He was awarded many prizes, including the Bocher Prize (1979) and the Steele Prize (1989), from the Ameri-

Alberto Pedro Calderón, mathematician; born Mendoza, Argentina 14 September 1920; Head of Practical Studies, University of Buenos Aires 1947-48; Rockefeller Fellow, University of Chicago 1949-50, Professor of Mathematics 1959-75, University Professor 1975-98; Visiting Associate Professor, Ohio University 1950-53; member, Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton University 1953-55; Associate Professor of Mathematics, MIT 1955-59; married 1950 Mabel Malinelli Walls (died 1985; one son, one daughter), 1989 Alexandra Bagdasar, died Chicago, Illinois 16 April 1998.

Discovery
Murphy v. Murphy, Ch D (Neuberger J) 1 Apr 1978.
Under the "equitable jurisdiction" (see *A v. C* [1980] 2 All

ER 347) the court could order the defendant, who was not otherwise an appropriate party to proceedings, to disclose to the plaintiff, who was a potential beneficiary under certain discretionary trusts, the names and addresses of the present trustees.

Overland Financing SA v Rahn & ors CA
(Nourse, Mummery LJ, Sir Christopher
Slade) 1 Apr 1998.
Although a foreign entity which
was not a corporation could be

names of its partners. The plaintiff therefore had a choice whether to sue the defendants individually or as an entity. *Charles Bumball (Bircham & Co) for the defendants*. *Michael D. ...*

New markets emerge as exchanges battle over Europe

THE WEEK
AHEAD

DEREK PAIN

COMPETITION among share markets continues to grow, with established centres bidding to become powerful players as equity trading gets more international. London is fighting to retain its premier position in Europe – one of the reasons advanced for the introduction of the controversial order-driven trading system – as the French and Germans get more aggressive.

The struggle is spawning some interesting new markets. On the domestic front the Stock Exchange successfully launched the junior AIM market and John Jenkins has established an intriguing niche position with the lightly regulated Ofex market for fledgling and the more recent established companies.

With the euro due to appear next year it is not surprising that a new European market has decided the time is right to make presentations to London investors.

Last week Euro.NM held

court, at the City's Gibson Hall, a former bank preserved as a splendid example of past City elegance and glory.

Euro.NM, unlike another fledgling European market, Easdaq, has no London presence. Indeed, only the more sophisticated institutional investors are likely to climb on board and private investors might as well ignore it. Several influential London stockbrokers were unaware of it when I spoke to them after emerging from Gibson Hall.

Still, Euro.NM seems to be booming. It has existed 18 months and embraces approaching 80 companies. It expects to have 140 by the year end.

Its object is to provide a share market for what it calls, but fails to define, high-growth companies. An international giant, with thousands of shareholders and therefore capable of providing plenty of business for its share dealers, would, strangely, not be welcome.

Market members are, therefore, largely fledgling hi-tech or biotech vehicles with often little or no track record. It has yet to suffer any failures. Indeed, its performance index has soared.

Behind Euro.NM are four European Stock Exchanges – Amsterdam, Brussels, Frankfurt and Paris. Talks are on with three other continental exchanges. London, however, has remained aloof.

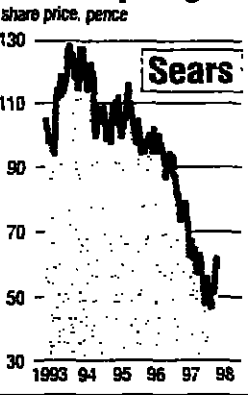
Some have mistakenly compared AIM with Euro.NM. The markets cater for different needs and AIM's share index display is eroded by its best performers moving to the main market. AIM, which enjoyed record trading last month – reflecting the Budget tax changes – is much more broadly based; only a third of its constituents would fit Euro.NM's criteria.

Whether London will eventually forge some relationship with the European newcomer remains to be seen. The two

have had occasional talks but I get the impression current Stock Exchange thinking rules out a formal link.

And, unlike Easdaq – the European market directly related to the hugely successful American Nasdaq market – Euro.NM has not attracted any British companies, unless a Canadian group with Welsh

Share Spotlight



trading operations is included.

It may be significant that out of its five offices only one – London – is in a City where it has no share-trading facilities. The London office clearly indicates the fledgling hi-tech market feels a need for a British representation.

With clear regulatory differences between AIM and Euro.NM I would not be surprised if an attempt is made to set up shop here.

Clive Pedder, its man in London, says the lack of a British role is "an obvious weakness". He adds: "Our preference is to establish a market with the LSE: if that is not possible we will explore alternatives."

It all means investors now have a wider choice of markets than since the 1960s when the various provincial stock markets, Birmingham, Manchester and even Oldham, were closed.

Still, whatever the market, it is profits, dividends and corpo-

rate activity which keeps things bubbling. This week's schedule is again dominated by retailers, although the first fixture of the drinks profits season is provided by Allied Domecq.

Debenhams and Arcadia, as well as long-suffering Sears, are in the frame.

Sears, planning to float its Selfridges department store and Freeman's mail-order business, is likely to have yet another dismal tale to unfold. Year's profits could emerge around £45m against £88.1m. Exceptional charges will take their toll. Retailing battered and bruised from the shoe industry will be responsible for most of the charges, expected to be £170m.

Allied's half-time figures will be flat – say £295m against £317m. The figures could, however, be overshadowed by corporate developments.

The creation of Diageo, now worth £27.5bn, has put intense pressure on Allied. Although rumours have

swirled about its intentions, the retailing and spirit group has so far displayed little response.

There were suggestions it should split into two stand-alone companies – retailing and spirits. But its chairman, Sir Christopher Hogg, rejected such a move.

This month's swirls of action on the pub front. There have been rumours of various deals, ranging from a £2.2bn management buyout to a £3bn offer from Daiwa, the Japanese investment house.

Allied has held talks about beefing up its spirits side. It is thought to be reluctant to get too deeply involved with any of its rivals and would be happy to settle for distribution and marketing deals.

But with rival Seagram getting deeper and deeper into showbiz it may find the Canadians are willing to sell their drinks arm. If it does not buy it then one of its rivals will, leaving Allied even more exposed.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is the latest twelve months' declared gross dividend as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding extraordinary items but including exceptional gains. Prices are Bloomberg prices. Other dealer ex-rights: E – dividend; E-1 – dividend; E-2 – dividend; E-3 – dividend; E-4 – dividend; E-5 – dividend; E-6 – dividend; E-7 – dividend; E-8 – dividend; E-9 – dividend; E-10 – dividend; E-11 – dividend; E-12 – dividend; E-13 – dividend; E-14 – dividend; E-15 – dividend; E-16 – dividend; E-17 – dividend; E-18 – dividend; E-19 – dividend; E-20 – dividend; E-21 – dividend; E-22 – dividend; E-23 – dividend; E-24 – dividend; E-25 – dividend; E-26 – dividend; E-27 – dividend; E-28 – dividend; E-29 – dividend; E-30 – dividend; E-31 – dividend; E-32 – dividend; E-33 – dividend; E-34 – dividend; E-35 – dividend; E-36 – dividend; E-37 – dividend; E-38 – dividend; E-39 – dividend; E-40 – dividend; E-41 – dividend; E-42 – dividend; E-43 – dividend; E-44 – dividend; E-45 – dividend; E-46 – dividend; E-47 – dividend; E-48 – dividend; E-49 – dividend; E-50 – dividend; E-51 – dividend; E-52 – dividend; E-53 – dividend; E-54 – dividend; E-55 – dividend; E-56 – dividend; E-57 – dividend; E-58 – dividend; 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Hopes grow for soft landing as rates appear to peak

Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

THE ECONOMY is probably gliding in for a soft landing, according to a new report today. Hopes that interest rates have now reached a peak and that the build-up of inflationary pressures is drawing to an end should mean the economy can avoid recession.

Recent economic data have encouraged these hopes, with virtually no economists expecting the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee to raise the cost of borrowing next week. The quarterly survey

from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) out tomorrow, is expected to bring further news of falling export orders.

The main threat to growth this year comes from the strength of the pound, according to the report from Oxford Economic Forecasting. Due in part to rising UK interest rates, this has taken manufacturing close to recession, and reduced growth in exports and investment.

The report also predicts that the consumer boom will wind down, partly because people whose mortgage payments are reviewed annually are only now feeling the impact of last year's interest-rate increases.

"Taking all of these factors together, we expect to see economic growth falling back sharply through the rest of 1998," the report comments.

It forecasts GDP growth of 2.2 per cent this year, which should keep inflation close to its 2.5 per cent target. It would also allow unemployment to fall by another 100,000 or so during the course of this year, before starting to climb again next year.

However, economist Adrian Cooper warns that there is still a chance that interest rates will need to rise again. The risk is posed by the possibility that consumer spending will not slow.

One possible boost would be additional spending from last year's windfalls of free shares in converting building societies. Less of this £35bn windfall than expected was spent in 1997, which could simply mean that expenditure has been postponed into 1998.

Another danger is posed by higher pay growth. A survey published this morning by the Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF) suggests that pay settlements have stabilised. The average increase reported by members was 3.47 per cent in the three months to January, little higher than the preceding three months.

The EEF says this demonstrates a

"responsible attitude" on the part of the industry. However, although there were very few settlements in March, the average for the month alone was 3.88 per cent, a marked increase and the highest for more than two years.

In a speech last week, made after official figures showed private-sector pay deals picking up in February, Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, warned of the need for employers and workers to keep the lid on pay in order to maintain economic stability.

A further concern is whether growth has slowed as much as official figures suggest.

Surveys like that carried out by the CBI have been much stronger than the official figures for manufacturing output. And a report due out tomorrow, on research already published in the journal *Business Economics*, indicates that the CBI survey itself tends to underestimate growth.

The research, by two former CBI economists, finds that the "balance" figure, the proportion of firms expecting exports or output to fall rather than rise, underestimates actual growth. Andrew Sentance and Paul Robson conclude that the recent negative balances reported by the CBI reflect a pause in exports rather than a decline.

VW set to raise offer for Rolls-Royce

By Nigel Cope
Associate City Editor

VOLKSWAGEN is expected to intensify the bid for Rolls-Royce later this week by making a renewed approach for the luxury car marque. The decision follows a meeting of Volkswagen's supervisory board in Germany at the weekend where executives sanctioned the strategy of Ferdinand Piech, the board's chairman. It is thought the committee backed Mr Piech to offer up to £500m for Rolls-Royce to Vickers, its parent company, though some sources said the offer is more likely to be around £400m.

This would still beat the £340m offer made by rival bidder BMW, whose period of exclusive negotiations with Vickers runs out on Thursday. However, its terms will not be directly comparable with BMW's, as Volkswagen's offer is thought to include the Cosworth engines business.

Volkswagen is expected to make an approach to Vickers or its financial advisers, Lazards, after Vickers' annual meeting on Wednesday.

BMW refused to comment on the news, but a spokesman repeated an earlier threat that if its bid does not win it would cancel its contract to supply engines to Rolls-Royce.

Volkswagen made its decision after a three-hour meeting at its offices in Wolfsburg. Mr Piech was so keen to persuade his fellow directors of the merits of a higher bid that he had a Rolls-Royce Silver Seraph flown in for the meeting in order to give his colleagues a taste of what they might be buying.

A spokesman for VW said: "The supervisory board met for an extensive meeting and agreed a strategy for the management to open discussion with Vickers once they have the opportunity."

Rolls-Royce said yesterday that it still expected its deal with BMW to go through. "I see no reason why not," said Graham Morris, Rolls-Royce's chief executive, who was in Le Mans in France as part of the launch of the new Bentley Arnage.

BMW also said it remained confident its takeover of Rolls-Royce would be completed. "For us nothing changes. We continue to believe that our offer remains the most attractive and remind everyone that the Rolls-Royce board chose us," a spokesman said.

As part of its enhanced offer, Volkswagen has already undertaken to maintain a British management team and manage the Rolls and Bentley brands separately; manufacture engines for both marques in the

UK; raise production to 10,000 units a year and invest up to £2bn in the product range over the next decade.

If Volkswagen's negotiations should fail, its supervisory board is considering developing its own line of luxury limousines by reviving the old names of Horch and Bugatti. VW already holds the rights to the Horch name and is finalising talks to acquire rights to Bugatti, industry sources said.

Volkswagen reported its first-quarter figures at the weekend, showing that net profits doubled to DM345m (£119m) while production of the VW group rose 11 per cent to 1.153 million units. Sales rose 23 per cent to DM33bn despite a 15.6 per cent dip in Asian deliveries caused by Far Eastern economic turmoil.

In France, Mr Morris said demand for the new Rolls-Royce Silver Seraph model launched earlier this year was exceeding expectations. He said Rolls-Royce had received 350 orders for the Seraph and 100 orders for the Bentley Arnage.

Rolls-Royce has been up for sale since last September. At the end of March Vickers named BMW as its preferred bidder, giving the group until 30 April to secure a deal. After that date, the sale process will be thrown open to rival offers.



Net profits: The float will make Bridget Blow, the chief executive, a millionaire Photograph: NewsTeam

ITNET to cash in on computer boom

By Clifford German

ITNET, the former information technology (IT) division of Cadbury Schweppes, is to seek a stock market listing this summer in a move which will value the company at between £150m and £200m. The float will make millionaires of six of the group's directors, including chief executive Bridget Blow. Most of the 1,600 employees will also have shares worth an average of £30,000 each.

ITNET, which operates information technology services on behalf of the Royal Automobile Club (RAC) and a host of local authorities, is the

latest in a string of companies to cash in on the boom in computer services. Computacenter, which distributes and installs computer systems for corporate clients, announced plans for a £1bn flotation last month.

About half of ITNET is being floated and £30m in new money is being raised through a placing by Kleinwort Benson. The new money raised will pay off £20m worth of debt and raise capital for further growth, including acquisitions. The business is growing at an annual rate of around 20 per cent and made an operating profit of £5.9m on a turnover of £81.7m in 1997.

The six directors, who have 25 per

cent of the company between them, will retain 60 per cent of their shares. More than 1,200 employees, who hold a further 25 per cent, will have the option to cash in their holdings. Cadbury Schweppes, which owns 12.5 per cent of the shares and three venture capital groups, 3i, NatWest Ventures and Lloyds Bank Development Capital, will supply the balance of shares.

Cadbury Schweppes set up ITNET as its in-house IT company in 1973 and later turned it into a separate company. Two-and-a-half years ago the management and employees bought out the company for £37m with the help of venture capitalists.

Lloyd's considers dropping names

LLOYD'S of London, the 300-year-old insurance market, is considering a plan to drop the wealthy individuals or "names" who traditionally join syndicates to take on insurance risks for one year at a time and accept unlimited liability to meet the claims. They would be replaced by limited liability companies able to accept long-term risks.

After a run of heavy losses in the early years of the Nineties, the number of names has plunged from a peak of 30,000 a decade ago to less than 7,000. More than 60 per cent of the annual business is already undertaken by corporate members, who were first allowed to join Lloyd's only after the capacity of the market began to shrink.

The market's chief executive, Ron Sandler, believes the annual renewal of insurance reduces the market's ability to take on long-term risks, and other experts believe the market could reduce its costs by up to £200m, or 2 per cent of its annual premium income, by switching entirely to corporate membership.

Opec agrees cuts

LEADING GULF Arab states in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) have signalled their readiness to cut exports again, Opec ministers said yesterday. With prices staying close to their lowest level in nine years, some of the world's most powerful oil states have raised the prospect of a further round of output cuts when Opec ministers meet again on 24 June. Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates said they supported calls for Opec to boost prices by stemming flows to the industrialised world.

Sowester buyout

A MANAGEMENT team led by the managing director, John Buck, and the finance director, Robert Edmond, has bought out Sowester, a leading distributor of marine equipment based in Poole, from its US parent, Krug International, for £10.4m. Financial backing has been provided by 3i and Bank of Scotland. Founded in 1947 as a ship's chandlery, Sowester now has annual sales of £20m and employs 85 people.

Confidence ebbs

BUSINESS confidence has been ebbing slowly for the past five quarters but is still above the long-term average, according to the business barometer compiled by 3,000 companies backed by venture capitalists 3i. The barometer anticipates changes in the growth rate of the UK economy by two to three-quarters but has provided an accurate reflection of trends over the past 10 years. The most recent peak, in the fourth quarter of 1996, was significantly lower than the previous peaks in the third quarter of 1988 and the first quarter of 1994, and the first quarter of 1988 was the weakest since the third quarter of 1992.

Racial jobs divide

UNEMPLOYMENT rates in the UK's non-white minority communities can be twice the national average and earnings can be as much as 17 per cent lower, according to a report by the Economic & Social Research Council today.

But there are encouraging signs, according to Professor Derek Leslie of Manchester Metropolitan University. Around 30 per cent of non-whites of working age were born in the UK and are doing somewhat better than their foreign-born parents. They still are twice as likely to be unemployed but there are no discernible differences in earnings.

British Aerospace to invest £400m in Saab stake

By Nigel Cope

BRITISH AEROSPACE is expected to announce plans this week to invest £350m-£400m in Saab, the Swedish military aircraft manufacturer, in return for a stake of around 30 per cent. BAe refused to comment on what it described as speculation and market rumour. "Everybody is talking to everybody else," a spokesman said.

BAe is keen to play its part in the consolidation of the European defence industry as is Saab. BAe's investment is likely to be the prelude to a stock market flotation of Saab, by investor, its parent company. Though BAe would be the largest single investor in Saab, overall control would remain in the hands of Swedish investors, including the Wallenberg empire. Separately, it is understood that

BAe is considering potential acquisitions in the US. These could include Northrop Grumman, the aerospace and electronics group, which is also being eyed up by BAe's main rival GEC.

Regarding Saab, a BAe spokesman repeated the company's statements over the last two years - that the European industry needed to be restructured and that talks were ongoing between all parties.

A Saab executive said last week that the company should be part of a single European aerospace and defence giant - if such a group were created by industry restructuring. He added that Saab would probably not manage "especially well" on its own in the long term.

The Wallenberg family holding company which owns Saab has said it was studying the possibility of broadening Saab's ownership

and listing it on the Stockholm bourse.

European governments want to consolidate the aerospace industry by forming a group big enough to compete against US giants such as Boeing and Lockheed Martin.

The partners of the Airbus civil aviation consortium - BAe, Aerospatiale of France, Daimler-Benz Aerospace (Dasa), of

Germany, and Spain's Casa - said in March they had agreed in principle to form a single European aerospace group.

However, their commitment, made in an unpublished report in response to a request last December by the French, British and German governments, set no timetable for a possible merger and offered few other details on the consolidation.

Boeing steps up campaign to win British Airways order

By Michael Harrison

BOEING is stepping up its efforts to win a £2.4bn order from British Airways for up to 100 new jets, with a campaign emphasising how much of the work would be carried out by UK suppliers.

The US aircraft manufacturer is in competition with the Euro-

pean consortium Airbus Industrie for the order, which BA is expected to award around the end of June or early July.

Boeing says that if BA selects its New Generation 737 aircraft for the giant order, then it will create work for 25 UK suppliers including British Aerospace - which is also a member of Airbus.

GEC-Marconi and Smiths Industries. According to Boeing executives, more than 30 major components, ranging from the rudder and dorsal fin to windshield, wing assemblies and electronic instrumentation, are manufactured in the UK.

The campaign is a key one for both Boeing and Airbus, which has

yet to succeed in selling a single aircraft to BA despite being involved in a number of competitions.

As part of the campaign to emphasise its "European" credentials, Boeing has also appointed its first president of Boeing Europe. Richard James took up the post earlier this month and is based in Brussels.

Boeing says it has 400 major suppliers across Europe and supports 90,000 European jobs. In the UK, it spends £2.3bn (£1.4bn) a year with more than 200 suppliers.

BA has asked the two aircraft manufacturers to come up with innovative ways of financing the order so that BA can take the

aircraft off its balance sheet altogether.

One option is for BA to lease the planes by the hour when they are in the air, leaving the manufacturers liable for everything from maintenance and repair costs to residual values when the aircraft reach the end of their working lives.

STOCK MARKETS

Indices	Close	Wk's chg	Wk's chg %	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield %
FTSE 100	5863.90	-68.30	-0.98	6150.5	4361.2	3.52
FTSE 250	3600.33	81.10	1.47	3605.8	4384.2	2.89
FTSE 350	2832.90	-14.90	-0.52	2936.7	2199.3	3.06
FTSE All Share	2764.67	-12.49	-0.45	2861.2	2106.39	3.37
FTSE SmallCap	2641.60	17.80	0.68	2641.4	2182.1	2.97
FTSE Floating	1417.30	11.60	0.83	1415.3	1225.2	3.24
FTSE Asia	1076.30	3.60	0.30	1035.7	955.9	1.08
Dow Jones	9084.62	-102.38	-1.12	9213.33	6701.14	1.53
Nikkei	16011.24	307.44	1.98	20910.79	14488.21	0.94
Hang Seng	10879.32	-121.36	-1.10	15820.31	7999.13	3.69
Dax	5144.28	-124.27	-2.36	5442	3361.71	1.57

INTEREST RATES

UK Interest rates				US Interest rates			
Index	3 month	1 yr	5 yr	10 yr	1 yr	5 yr	10 yr
US	7.50	7.04	7.45	0.45	5.81	-1.82	5.75
US	5.69	-0.16	5.92	-0.46	5.67	-1.26	5.95
Japan	0.63	0.06	0.67	-0.09	1.80	-0.65	2.41
Germany	3.84	0.42	3.94	0.56	4.93	-0.97	5.47
BOND YIELDS							
Index	3 month	1 yr	5 yr	10 yr	1 yr	5 yr	10 yr
US	7.50	7.04	7.45	0.45	5.81	-1.82	5.75
US	5.69	-0.16	5.92	-0.46	5.67	-1.26	5.95
Japan	0.63	0.06	0.67	-0.09	1.80	-0.65	2.41
Germany	3.84	0.42	3.94	0.56	4.93	-0.97	5.47
MAIN PRICE CHANGES							
Index	Price (p)	Wk's chg	% chg	Index	Price (p)	Wk's chg	% chg
Telewest Comm	103.50	17.00	19.65	Brit Biotech	50.00	-9.00	-18.25
Premier Oil	43.75	6.25	16.67	Commercial Union	1070.00	-166.00	-15.43
BSA Ferrus	495.00	68.50	16.08	Gen Accident	1387.00	-176.00	-11.25
BPE	322.00	57.00	15.62	Prudent Corp	790.00	-98.00	-11.04

CURRENCIES

Pound				Dollar			
Index	Price	Wk's chg	% chg	Index	Price	Wk's chg	% chg
Dollar	1.6875	-1.75c	-1.6255	Sterling	0.5997	+0.02p	0.6152
D-Mark	2.9891	-5.50p	2.7880	D-Mark	1.7917	-1.61p	1.7266
Yen	218.02	-12.84	-205.17	Yen	131.25	+0.54	126.46
E index	105.50	-1.80	99.80	S index	109.30	-0.20	105.70
OTHER INDICATORS							
Index	Price	Wk's chg	% chg	Index	Price	Wk's chg	% chg
Brent Oil (\$)	13.24	-0.59	-17.42	GDP	114.60	2.80	111.48
Gold (\$)	312.65	4.90	340.75	RPI	160.80	3.50	155.36
Silver (\$)	6.32	0.04	4.71	Base Rates	7.25	6.00	
www.bloomberg.com/uk				source: Bloomberg			

TOURIST RATES

Australia (\$)	2.4880	Malta (lira)	0.6308
Austria (schillings)	20.41	Mexican (nuevo peso)	12.81
Belgium (francs)	60.02	Netherlands (guilders)	3.2687
Canada (\$)	2.3303	New Zealand (\$)	2.8849
Cyprus (pounds)	0.8488	Norway (krone)	12.17
Denmark (krone)	11.15	Portugal (escudos)	205.70
Finland (markka)	6.8878	Saudi Arabia (riyal)	6.0582
France (francs)	8.7485	Singapore (\$)	2.5019
Germany (marks)	2.9179	Spain (pesetas)	246.54
Greece (drachmas)	504.26	South Africa (rand)	8.1054
Hong Kong (\$)	12.51	Sweden (krona)	12.57
Ireland (pounds)	1.1509	Switzerland (francs)	2.4138
India (rupees)	68.75	Thailand (bahts)	58.49
Israel (shekels)	5.7515	Turkey (liras)	398.114
Italy (lira)	2887	USA (\$)	1.6262
Japan (yen)	212.17		
Malaysia (ringgits)	5.9325		

Rates for information purposes only
Source: Thomas Cook

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GAVYN DAVIES ON WHY BOND PRICES SUPPORT THE CASE FOR HIGHER RETURNS IN THE LONG TERM

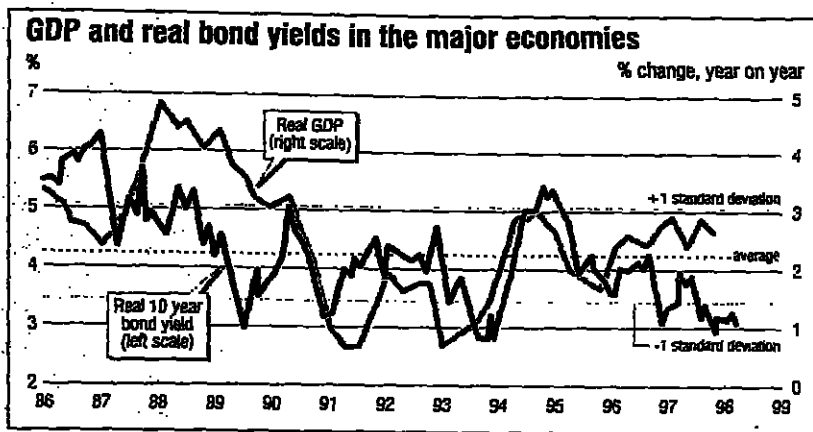
This global bull market could run and run

THE BULL MARKET in global stock markets has now continued unabated for over three years, in which period world share prices (outside Japan) have more than doubled. Many commentators, particularly in the UK, have spent almost this entire period warning their readers that the bull market was becoming over-extended and that a crash must be just around the corner. One day, they will presumably be right, but investors who had listened to the gloomsters a year or two ago would have missed one of the great bull markets of this century. It would now take a remarkable bear market to wipe out more than a small part of these huge gains.

The global equity strategists at Goldman Sachs (Jeffrey Weingarten and Neil Williams) have remained optimistic about share prices throughout the last few years, primarily because they have not shared the common view that stocks were becoming expensive relative to bonds and cash. They calculate that about half of the 120 per cent rise in share prices since 1994 has been explained simply by the rise in corporate earnings. The other half has, of course, triggered a fall in the earnings yield on the market (or, equivalently, a rise in the price-earnings ratio), but at least until the end of last year, this has been almost exactly matched by a drop in global bond yields.

Hence, there had been no change in the valuation of equities relative to bonds up to the end of 1997 – the risk premium on equities has remained unchanged. It follows logically from this that those who believed that equities were expensive should also have believed that bonds were severely overvalued too.

This situation has changed in the first few months of 1998. The 15 per cent rise



in global equities this year (again excluding Japan) has occurred without any significant gain in corporate earnings, and without any sizeable decline in bond yields. Hence the equity risk premium has fallen, lending some support to those who believe that equities are becoming expensive.

But the mis-match between bond and equity valuations has not yet become too disturbing by the standards of past bull markets, and is probably not sufficient taken on its own to end the bull run. It would only be if bond yields started to rise that the bull market would be seriously threatened. Therefore, the health of the world's financial markets is very heavily dependent on whether today's exceptionally low bond yields can be sustained.

The decline in global bond yields since the end of 1994 has substantially exceeded the decline in inflation. In other words, real or inflation-adjusted bond yields have declined sharply, from over 5.5 per cent to around 3 per cent. This decline in real bond yields has, in fact, been

the main driver for the boom in financial markets over this period, so the outlook for real yields is probably the most important single element in determining the future course of world asset prices. Does the decline in real yields represent a return to normal, after the artificially high real yields of the 1980s and early 1990s? Or does it represent a temporary bubble, which will soon be reversed?

As the graph shows, the recent decline in real yields has left them standing more than one standard deviation below their 12-year average, and this is particularly unusual given the robust growth in global GDP which has been recorded in the past three years.

Unlike in 1991, and in 1993, when real yields also dropped sharply, it is difficult to attribute their latest decline to a cyclical slowdown in the world economy. Something else must be going on. What is it?

Standard econometric models of real bond yields have found that two main factors have been responsible for the major

swings in real bond yields in the past two decades, and in particular, the rise in yields in the early 1980s. First, the ratio of public debt to GDP has risen remorselessly, increasing the burden of government funding on the world capital markets. Second, the rate of return on private capital (ie equities) has also risen dramatically, reflecting the restoration of the profit share in the major economies following the upsurge in wages in the 1970s.

It is clear that neither of these factors is capable of explaining the drop in real yields since 1994. Although budget deficits in some economies have been brought under control, the outstanding burden of existing public debt has not been reduced. And the return on private capital has hit new highs. Therefore, we need to seek the explanation elsewhere.

There are, in fact, two other forces at work, each of which has probably had a role to play. The more obvious one is that the leading central banks, especially in Japan and continental Europe, have provided liquidity to the money markets at exceptionally low interest rates and some of this may have "leaked along the yield curve" as investors have searched for higher returns than cash has offered. This may have artificially reduced real bond yields for a temporary period.

New work at Goldman Sachs by Jan Hatzius (still tentative and unpublished at this stage) has found evidence that bond yields in the major economies are powerfully influenced by the level of short-term rates in the rest of the world, so there is reason to believe that excess liquidity in Japan may have driven bond yields lower in the US and other countries. If this explanation proves to be the dominant one, the outlook is not too rosy, since real bond yields will start to rise as

soon as the weighted average of global central banks starts to rein in liquidity – and this could happen before the year end. Asset prices would then be under severe threat.

The remaining explanation for low real yields, however, is far more optimistic. This involves the inflation risk premium which is built into the long-bond yield. At any given rate of inflation, bond holders need to make an assessment about whether today's inflation rate will be maintained throughout the life of the bond. Having lived through the unexpected inflation upsurge of the 1970s, when they were robbed of a large proportion of their real bond holdings, investors have since asked for significantly higher yields to insure against a similar occurrence in future.

To the extent that bondholders are becoming more comfortable that today's low inflation rate is a permanent feature of the landscape, they might be willing to live with less compensation for future risk – and that would imply permanently lower real yields. It is difficult to measure the long-run inflation risk premium directly, but indirect estimates derived from the behaviour of inflation-linked bonds in the US and UK suggest that it has indeed dropped sharply in the past 18 months.

This also accords with anecdotal evidence and, for my money, it is at the heart of the matter. If it does indeed turn out that a plummeting inflation risk premium is the prime explanation for today's low real bond yields, then bonds may prove surprisingly resilient in the face of any monetary tightening in the US and Europe, and any reversal in the global equity bull market should prove quite limited.

Co-op pays £481,000 to former director

By Nigel Cope
Associate City Editor

ONE OF THE Co-operative Wholesale Society's (CWS) most senior figures, who left before Andrew Regan's abortive £12m break-up bid last year, received £481,000 in compensation after leaving the group, it emerged yesterday. John Owen, the former retail controller who left last year after losing out to Graham Mackintosh for the chief executive position, was paid one year's salary and a further payment related to his 28 years' service.

Allan Green, the CWS's retail controller who succeeded Mr Owen and was sacked for his part in the Co-op scandal, received no compensation for loss of office after he admitted supplying confidential Co-op documents to Mr Regan. However,

David Chambers, Mr Green's deputy who took the Co-op to an industrial tribunal for unfair dismissal, received £150,000 after CWS admitted it had not complied with its own employment procedures and that its evidence against him was largely circumstantial.

The Co-op said it was "disappointed" with the Crown Prosecution Service's recent decision to drop criminal proceedings against Mr Regan and his associates. "We are disappointed with the outcome but as far as we are concerned it is business as usual," a spokesman said.

The comments came as the CWS reported a 34 per cent increase in profits before interest and dividends to £92m last year. However, the figure was boosted by a £24m profit from the sale of properties which included its

stake in Trafford Park, the Manchester retail development.

Profits from the group's beleaguered supermarket operations were flat, on sales up by £30m to £1bn. Like-for-like sales increased 3 per cent on the previous year. Total retailing profits fell from £37m to £32m.

The CWS's star performer was the Co-operative Bank once again. It boosted profits by 20 per cent to £53m.

The CWS said it was pleased with its overall performance after a "turbulent 1997". It said the supermarket sector remained "fiercely competitive" and attributed part of its profits fall to the payment of a £7m dividend following the decision to roll out the "divi" nationally. The CWS paid £23m into its reserves last year compared with £31.6m last year.



Ferry launches flotation plans

WHITE Horse Fast Ferries (WHFF), which last month won the contract to provide ferry services across the Thames to the Millennium Dome, plans to raise £1.85m via a flotation on Oxfex, the junior stock market next month. It will value WHFF, owned by Peter Lay (pictured

above) and his three brothers, at £7m. The funds will be used to build new ferry craft. The company acquired the Gravesend to Tilbury service from Sealink in March 1991 and for the past year has been operating a service between London Bridge and Canary Wharf.

Loan company offers apology to graduates

By Andrew Verity

THE Government has forced the Student Loans Company to apologise after 115,000 students were wrongly told they still owed loans which had been paid off up to seven years ago. Furious ministers ordered the Student Loans Company to take the blame after the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) wrote to graduates to tell them they owed money to Finance for Higher Education, the replacement for the Student Loans Company.

Greenwich NatWest, formerly NatWest Markets, won an auction held in March for the £1bn book of existing loans, which covers nearly 1.8 million students and 590,000 loans. However, many of the earliest loans were not included in the book sold to NatWest.

Failing to realise that over a

fifth of these loans had been paid off, the DfEE wrongly told all students who had not transferred to NatWest that they still had loans with the Student Loans Company.

Distressed graduates have besieged a hotline set up to deal with the problem after the DfEE realised its list was wrong.

The letter of apology from the Student Loans Company reads: "We now realise your details should not have been included as your loan has been repaid... there is no outstanding obligation to the Student Loans Company."

Around £3.6bn has been extended by the Student Loans Company since the scheme was set up in 1990. Graduates have paid back £320m. From October, loans will be paid back through tax. Repayments will start when income reaches £10,000, rather than £17,000.

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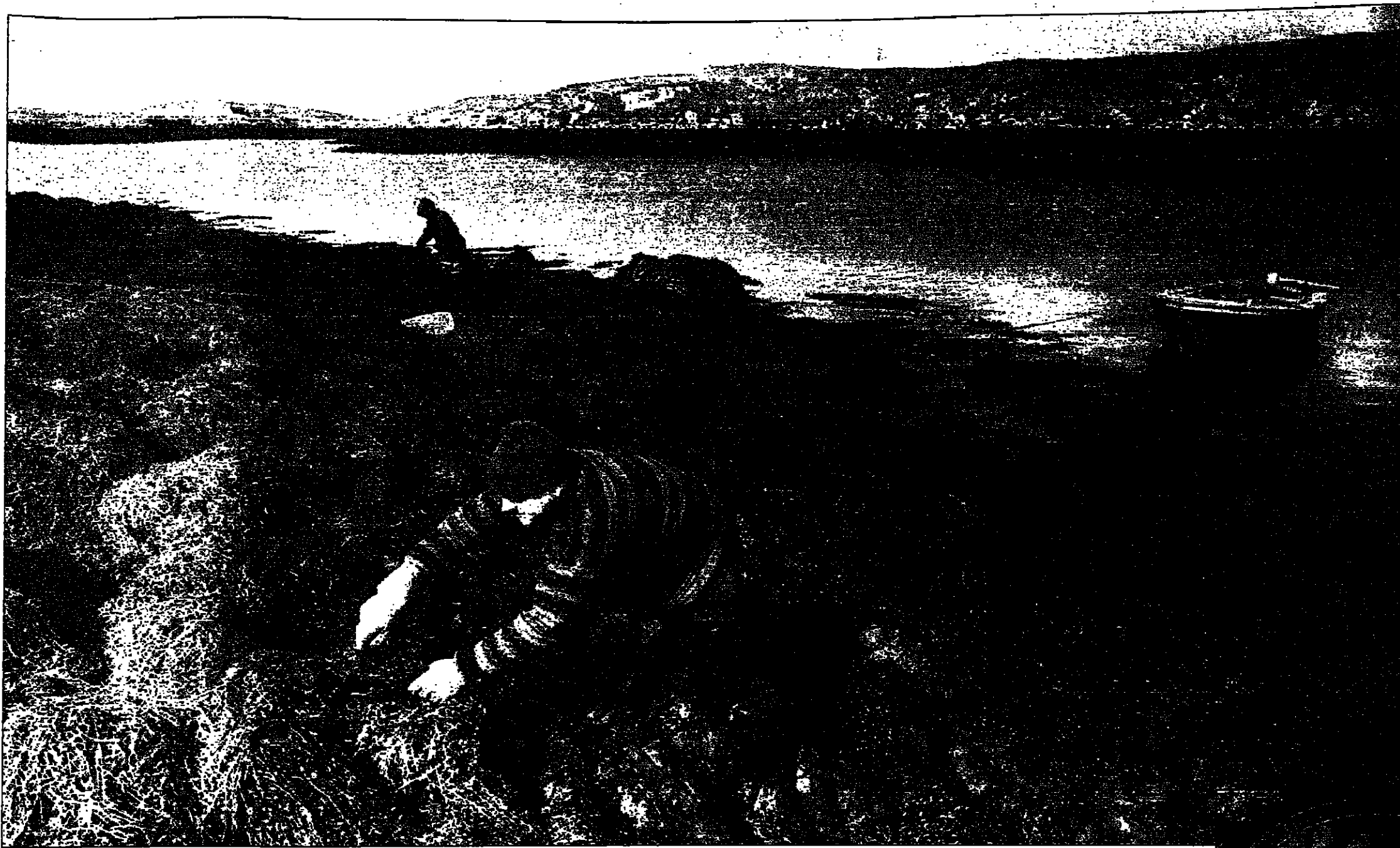
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Seaweed tax leaves crofters high and dry



All at sea: Two crofters harvest seaweed on North Uist in the Outer Hebrides during the low spring tide. It's back-breaking work and uses the minimum of equipment (below right). When the crofters have cut the seaweed (below left) they sell it by the tonne to an algininate company on the mainland.
Photograph by Colin McPherson



A dispute over feudal rights threatens an island community, **Clare Garner** reports

IT IS back-breaking work and poorly paid, but cutting seaweed is one of the few ways in which crofters in North Uist in the Outer Hebrides can scrape together their living.

However, the seaweed harvesters have discovered that their paltry remuneration - £15.20 per tonne - is being squeezed by the sixth Earl Granville, the Queen's godson and owner of a 50,000-acre estate which encompasses most of the island. He is evoking an ancient law which allows him to levy royalties on all seaweed collected on the island.

There are around 40 crofters and their families who cut seaweed from the rocks on Earl Granville's estate. They sell the seaweed to the algininate company Kelco's Ayrshire factory where it is turned into a thickening agent used in ketchup, toothpaste and jam. But they are losing out on an extra undisclosed sum which goes directly from Kelco to the Earl because of feudal rules of "foreshore entitlement".

For some crofters, the discovery was too much to take. In the past year, crofters' incomes have fallen by 40 per cent, as subsidies have been cut and demand for beef and lamb has

fallen. One crofter, who preferred to remain anonymous, said that if he had another winter like the last he would emigrate to New Zealand.

Brian Wilson, the Scottish Office minister, a veteran campaigner for land reform in the Highlands and Islands, denounced the seaweed tax.

"There is no opportunity too petty to exploit for some landowners. These absurd and archaic royalties on natural resources should be removed. They are relics of a feudal age," he said. "It's the principle rather than huge amounts of money, but crofters get so little that to be charging anything seems to be ridiculous."

George MacDonald, the Earl's factor, defended seaweed royalties, which were first implemented when seaweed harvesting began in the Uists in the 18th century. In a letter to the *West Highland Free Press*, he wrote: "Seaweed royalties are one of the few natural sources of income available to the estate and last year, together with mineral royalties and croft rents, accounted for only 8 per cent of the income required to offset our basic administration costs."

The Scottish Crofters' Union is calling for the Gov-

ernment to scrap feudal rights. "People in these areas are struggling to make ends meet. The benefits should rest with the people and the communities who carry out the work and not be drained off by landowners," said John Toal, the union's director.

"These things belong to the past and we will be seeking their abolishment under the new land reform legislation being con-

sidered by the Government."

At the end of a good day of cutting seaweed, a crofter goes home with £45. But since seaweed can only be collected at the low spring tides, which come every full and new moon, crofters must find alternative employment for the other weeks. "We keep sheep and cattle, carry out odd jobs, go fishing, whatever we can to survive," said one.

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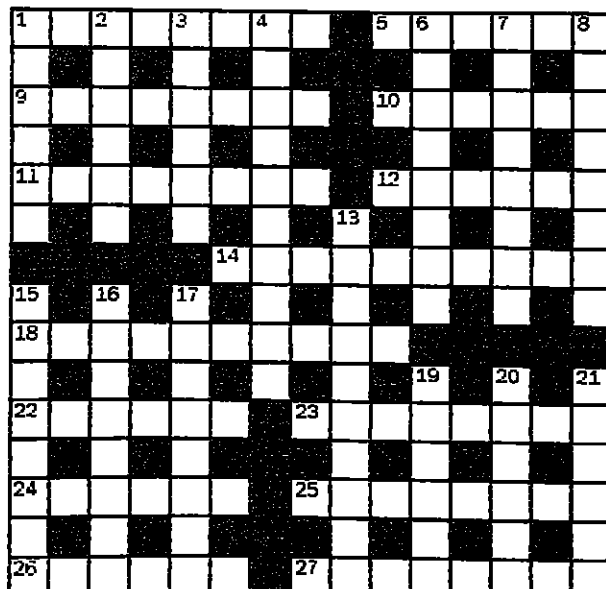
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THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3595, Monday 27 April

By Portia



- ACROSS**
- Pressure members involved in business (8)
 - Rash union leader enters and speaks at length (6)
 - I told Ray off for delaying (8)
 - Let out very little, in speech (6)
 - Generous settlement in West Africa (8)
 - American's gone retaining money, just about (6)
 - Positive crafty Lorna lied to dramatist (10)
 - Overlooked a cool place to be (2,3,5)
 - Measure average return which is around one hundred (6)
 - Good few are full of regret for being horrible (8)
 - Moderate is expressing anger (6)
 - Fashionable face is about to undergo a change (4,4)

- DOWN**
- Check at the back (6)
 - Push further forwards way ahead of swimmer (8)
 - Put in order and fool young beginner without a doubt (6)
 - Isn't bitter over quarters developing mould (6)
 - Land in the West at Exmouth (6)
 - Carry on with claim against English inventor (10)
 - Pair escape when caught in bar (8)
 - French article number's upset about - only natural (8)
 - Point to issue of civil disorder (9)
 - Wasn't ruled out as causing itchy feet (10)
 - Striker has belief in less than perfect union (8)
 - Regular staff employee on the farm (8)
 - Individual lines absorbing Italian artist (8)
 - Hears singer of note (6)
 - Lie about easy chair being reduced (6)
 - Note current direction taken by celebrity (6)

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